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Sea Swallow

Annual Report of the Royal Naval Birdwatching Society

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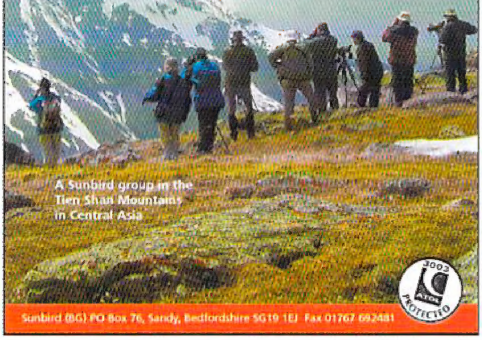

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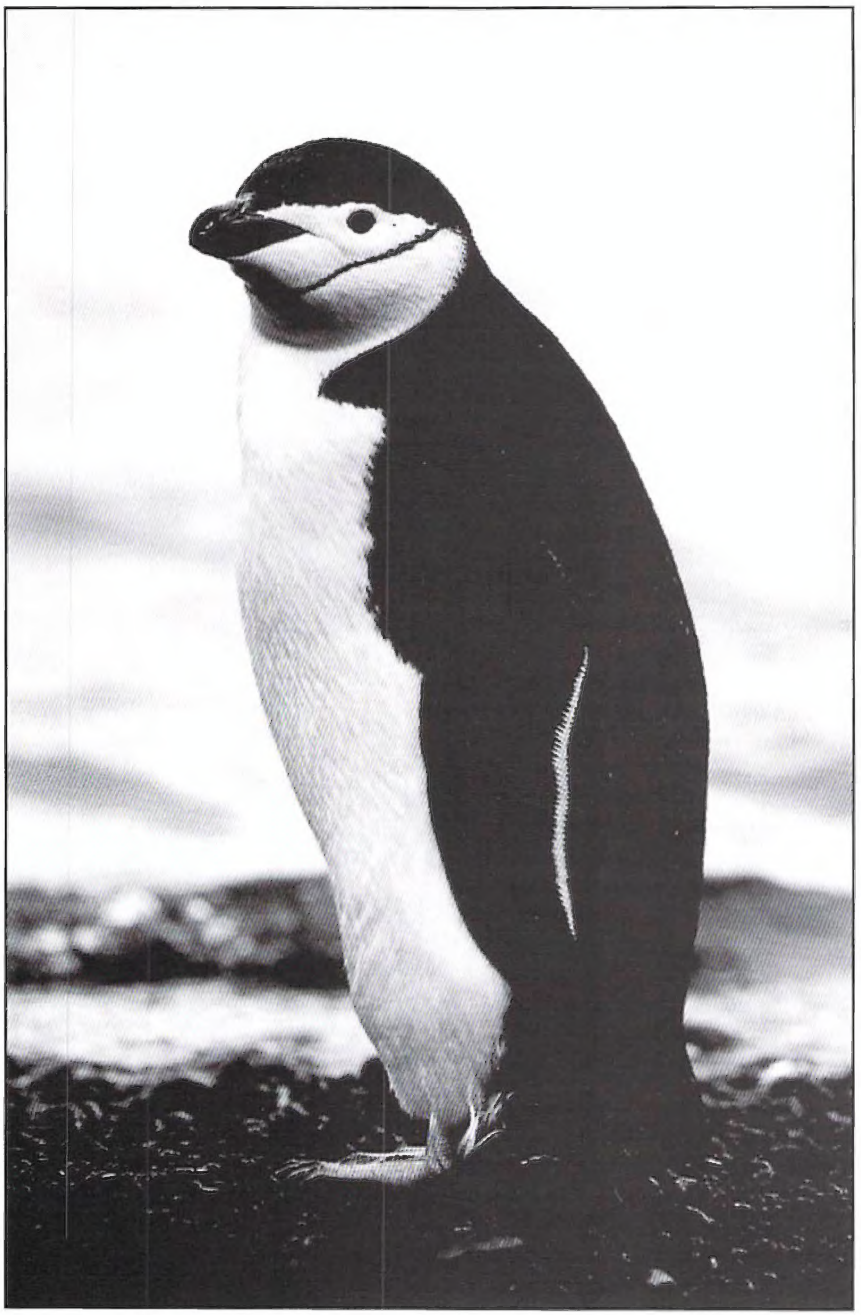

Chinstrap Penguin *(Pygoscelis antarctica)*, Antaretica 2002.
Photo: Capt I Moncrieff, Royal Navy.

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For details of Local Representatives and other useful addresses, see page 72.
Subscription rates: Full and associate members £12 annually. Due 1 January.
Library rates: Cost of *Sea Swallow* £10 plus postage.
Membership: has been widened from the RN to include those, regardless of nationality, who share a common background of the sea.
Aims and Activities: The primary aim of the Society is to promote a forum for the exchange of information on seabirds, and of landbirds at sea, by members for whom birdwatching is a spare-time recreation and hobby. The secondary aim is to co-ordinate the efforts of individual members using standardised recording methods so that observations can be of value to the professional ornithologist ashore. In addition to the promotion of observations afloat, the RNBWS organises fieldwork and expeditions, usually in cooperation with the Army and RAF Ornithological Societies.
RNBWS Record Forms: Standardised forms for recording Seabirds and Landbirds at sea, Seabird Census sheets and Birds examined in the Hand (BEH) forms have been designed for use at sea. Stocks are held by The Honorary Secretary. Please give detailed requirements and enclose a large (A4) stamped and self addressed envelope.
Completed Record: Forms (both Seabirds and Landbirds) should be sent to the Editor of *Sea Swallow*.
Material for publication in *Sea Swallow* should be sent to the Editor. Instructions to authors can be found on page 72.
An application form for membership is at page 70 of this edition of *Sea Swallow*.

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PRESIDENT'S FOREWORD

The usual hand-full of members who gathered for our AGM in London in December 1999 were treated to a surprise bonus. Few of us will forget the quiet but commanding figure who took a seat on the platform and added a postscript to the Chairman's Report. Some of you will have spotted the passing of E M (Max) Nicholson, whose astonishing range of achievements has been saluted in the press. The RNBWS Spring Bulletin has in turn acknowledged his inspirational role in the foundation of our Society.

Perhaps the most pertinent lesson which Max Nicholson had for us on that short winter's day was that a small number of people, if they have the commitment and enthusiasm, can combine the performance of the most taxing public duties with a contribution to their chosen field of study. This has certainly been true for RNBWS, and for AOS and RAFOS, in the succeeding decades. I particularly recall the remarkable contribution of servicemen and women to wildlife observations in and around the Falkland Islands during and after the conflict of 1982.

Seafarers remain in an immensely privileged position to contribute to our understanding of the environment, its health, and our impact on it. So, well done and thank you to those who have made the time to contribute to this volume. With the Met Office publication *The Marine Observer*, our journal gives you the opening to follow up the pattern which our founders set and to provide invaluable 'soundings' in the web of sea-life round about you.

DAVID DOBSON, President

CHAIRMAN'S FOREWORD

The content of my E-mail inbox was much enhanced the other day by a surprise message from one of our ships 'somewhere in the N Atlantic'. Attached to it was a series of digital photographs which firmly substantiated the bridge team's identification of a Rose-coloured Starling *(Sturnus roseus)* in a sighting that will extend knowledge of the range of the species. It reinforced my intent to pursue an avenue for declassification of this and similar reports - all, I hasten to add, written up in the standard report sheets issued by UKHO. But my focus in this Foreword is on the potential impact of new technology. A click of a camera is much easier than the completion of a 'Bird in the Hand' form. We must be realistic. We are more likely to succeed in encouraging the former than the latter! Indeed this electronic bird report is not the first that I have received. Earlier in the year the Commanding Officer of HMS ENDURANCE E-mailed digital photographs which enabled me to tell him that two Cattle Egrets *(Bulbulcus ibis)* and a Giant Antshrike *(Batara cinerea)* had taken passage with him along the southern Brazilian coast.

The President has noted the passing of one of our remarkable founding members. Amongst Max Nicholson's undoubted gifts was the ability to see how the expanding technology of our armed services in wartime lent itself to observation of the environment in which they operated. He would most certainly have applauded the use of the remarkable new tools of today.

Finally, I would like to add a note of congratulation to our sister societies on the coverage in *Osprey* of expeditionary fieldwork, in the Outer Hebrides during SEABIRD 2000, and in Gibraltar during 2002. The discussion of survey methodologies, and the clear appendices, are excellent models. There is certainly no doubt in my mind that *Osprey* is very firmly launched as the place of record for joint service activity of this nature. Meanwhile, as the Editor will describe, *Sea Swallow 52* contains a fine spread of material from our sea-faring community. My appeal remains the same as ever - keep it coming, and exploit all the recording resources out there!

MICHAEL BARRITT, Chairman

EDITORIAL

Better late than never! Firstly, I must apologise for the late appearance of *Sea Swallow* 52 - my very short notice move to Iraq last July has obviously meant that I have been unable to devote time to the publication until my return to the UK in late December. This has highlighted the underlying fragility of the organisation that depends on the input of the few, particularly if they are serving members subject to short notice appointing in the current volatile environment. However, we have managed to produce another varied publication and the intention will be to publish *Sea Swallow* 53 on track in October 2004.

I would like to thank all the contributors this year; it has helped provide an interesting and varied publication that continues the tradition of *Sea Swallow*. In particular, the further coverage of Diego Garcia by Peter Carr develops the intimate and ground breaking research the society has provided on the Chagos archipeligo.

There is a continuing requirement for new articles and both seabird and landbird records to ensure *Sea Swallow* continues to flourish. Those of you lucky enough to be at sea or visiting areas for either business or pleasure please take the time to forward your records or produce an article for inclusion. I will be putting together my experiences in Iraq and the birds of the Shatt al Arab for the next edition.

GARY LEWIS, Editor

Eastern Pied Wheater *(Oeanthe picata)* on Lynx helicopter HMS Edingburgh, Gulf, January 2003. *Photo:* CWEM (R) S Copsey.

Sea Swallow 52 (2003)

NOTES ON SEABIRD REPORTS RECEIVED IN 2002/3

By N.G. Cheshire

A rather lean year for reports. Two large series of observations were received too late for inclusion this year. All contributors are thanked for their efforts. There is still much to be learned about seabirds at sea and systematic well detailed notes are extremely valuable.

OBSERVERS

D.K. Ballance *m.v.Republica di Roma*, NW Europe-Bilbao-Dakar-Banjul(Gambia)-Brazil-Argentina-Uruguay and return, Aug-Oct 2002,(59 page bound report).
m.v Focs Tenerife, NW Europe-Canary Is-Cadiz-Felixstowe, Feb-March 2003 (31N)
Capt.N.G.Cheshire *r.v.Franklin*, Hobart-Sydney-Wellington-50S 170W-Tonga, May-June 2001. (30C).
CWEM(R)S.Copsey, *HMS Edinburgh*, Arabian Gulf-Suez-Mediterranean, Feb-May (6C) UK-Gibraltar-Turkey and return, Sept 2002 (3C).
S.Gorton Green, various cargo passenger ships. Detailed notes from 13 voyages 1951-1965. UK-South Africa-East Africa-S.America-Australia-Malaysia.
Capt.T.Johannsen, *m.v.Dorothea Oldendorff*, St. Petersberg-Fortaleza (Brazil), May 2002 (2C).

R-RNBWS Report Sheets, C-RNBWS Census Sheets, B-RNBWS Bird in hand Forms, N - other notes, P - Photographs.

NOTES ON SPECIES

(Dates refer to 2002 unless otherwise mentioned. Positions are given in degrees and decimals of a degree, nm = nautical miles, tmc = 10 minute count)

Adult Magellanic Penguin *(Spheniscus magellanicus)* at burrow, Pebble Island, Falkland Islands, 28 Nov 1996. *Photo:* Sam Alexander.

PENGUINS *SPHENISCIDAE*

Magellanic Penguin ***Spheniscus magellanicus.*** Seen by DKB on 25 Sept near the northern limit of its range with one imm at 29.6S 49.5W and 12 in singles/groups at 31.2S 50.5W, one adult and an imm at 34.5S 53.6W and 11 mostly adults at 34.9S 54.4W approaching R.Plate on 26 Sept. Returning north on 30 Sept he saw 37 adults and immatures at 33.5S 52.3W off Uruguay and 62 plus six dead at 32.9S 51.7W.

GREBES *PODICIPEDIDAE*

White-tufted Grebe ***Rollandia rolland.*** DKB saw 15-20 in winter or immature plumage in Montevideo Harbour on 29 Sept.

ALBATROSSES *DIOMEDEIDAE*

Wandering Albatross ***Diomedea exulans.*** Small numbers up to three per tmc across the Tasman Sea from Sydney to Wellington, 14-22 May'01. Seen each day from 24 May to 9 June, Wellington SE to 50S 170W then north to 30S 170W. Largest concentration was on 31 May'01 at 43.9S 174.3W Chatham Rise with a tmc of 35 mostly antipodensis type birds(sea temp.13.33C). Heading north the last two birds were seen at 30S 170W on 9 June'01 (sea temp 20.16C). (NGC)

Southern Royal Albatross ***Diomedea (e.)epomophora.*** A single at 43.9S 179E west of Chatham Is on 25 May'01 and four at 44.2S 179.5E later the same day, singles at at 43.8S 173.9W and 43.8S 174.3W on 31 May'01, four at 42.2E 174.3W and five at 41.8S 174W NE of the Chatham Is on 1 June'01.(Sea temp range 10.30-14.17C) (NGC)

Northern Royal Albatross ***Diomedea (epomophora) sanfordi.*** One in the Tasman Sea at 37S 161.5E on 19 May'01 and another in Cook Strait at 41.6S 175E on 24 May'01. A single bird accompanied the ship for two hours at 43.9S 179E west of the Chatham Is on 25 May'01 and one was seen on the water at 40.5S 173W. (NGC)

Black-browed Albatross ***Diomedea melanophrys.*** Heading south along Brazilian coast DKB saw the first seven at 29S 48.9W, then 12 at 29.6S 49.3W and 95+ at 31.2S 50.5W on 25 Sept. He also saw seven at 34.5S 53.6W on 26th, 13 at 33.6S 52.3W,22 at 32.9S 51.7W and 11 at 31.5S 50.4W on 30th Sept. On 1 Oct 10 were recorded at 27.9S 48.3W with the last at 24.7S 48.2W. Single birds were recorded each day between Sydney and Wellington 14-22 May'01 and one to three adults and sub-adults between Wellington and 50S 170W 22-26 May'01. Heading north along the 170W meridian similar small numbers were seen with the last at 35.3S. (sea temp 16.8C) (NGC)

Shy Albatross ***Diomedea cauta.*** An adult and immature were seen at 40.4S 149.4E east of Cape Barren Island on 12 May'01. Single adult birds were recorded at 44.2S 179E on the Chatham Rise and further north at 38.6S 171.8W on 25 May and 3 June'01, with a sub-adult bird at 38.4S 171.6W the following day. (NGC)

Salvin's Albatross *Diomedea(cauta)salvini.* Two were seen at 43.9S 179.1E and another nearby at 44.1S 179.3E on the Chatham Rise on 25 May'01. (NGC)

Chatham Albatross *Diomedea(cauta)eremita.* A fine adult bird flew close to the ship at 42.2S 174.3W 130nm NE of the Chatham Is on 1 June'01. (NGC)

Yellow-nosed Albatross *Diomedea chlororhynchos.* In Brazilian waters DKB saw 182 around fishing vessels at 22.2S 40.8W on 20 Sept, an adult at Santos Roads(24S) on 22 Sept, 2140 albatrosses which were most likely Yellow-nosed around distant fishing vessels at 31.2S 50.5W on 25 Sept. Other concentrations observed by DKB included 200+ at 27.9S 48.3W on 1 Oct, 50+ at 27S 48.2W later the same day, 57 including 30 around a trawler when leaving Rio at 23.1S 42.6W, 17 at 22.8S 41.7W and the most northerly observation of four at 21.9S 40.7W, all on 5 Oct.

Grey-headed Albatross *Diomedea chrysostoma.* One adult was observed at 44.3S 173.8W ESE from Chatham Is on 31 May'01.(NGC)

Buller's Albatross *Diomedea bulleri.* A single bird was seen at 38.6S 167E in the Tasman Sea on 21 May'01 and another at 41.6S 175E in Cook Strait on the 24 May'01.To the SE of NZ two followed the ship at 44.1S 179.4E on 25 May, two were seen at 46.4S 176.1W on 26 May, one at 48S 170W on 28 May and three at 44.3S 173.8W on 31 May'01.(NGC)

Sooty Albatross *Phoebetria fusca.* GG recorded one at 41.9S 123.2E well south from Western Australia on 17 Dec'61.

Light-mantled Sooty Albatross *Phoebetria palpebrata.* Seen in small numbers SE from NZ with one at 44.2S 179.6E on 25 May'01, two at 49.1S 170.8W on 27 May'01, a maximum tmc of five at 48S 170W on 28 May'01, one at 46.7S 170.9W on 29 May'01, one at 44.3S 173.8W and another nearby at 43.9S 174.3W on 31 May'01 and the last at 35.3S 170W on 6 June'01. Sea Temps 10.51-16.53C. (NGC)

FULMARS *FULMARINAE*

Southern Giant Petrel *Macronectes giganteus.* One seen at 46.7S 170.9E on 29 May'01, a maximum tmc of 10 at 43.9S 174.3W E of the Chatham Is. on 31 May'01, three at 42.2S 174.3W on 1 June'01 and the last at 40.2S 172.9W on 2 June'01. (NGC)

Northern Giant Petrel *Macronectes halli.* DKB described a juvenile bird seen at 34.9S 54.4W in the approaches to the River Plate on 26 Sept and another at 33.6S 52.3W on 30 Sept. Three to six around the ship at 43.9S 179E west of the Chathams on 25 May'01,one at 46.4S 176.3W the next day, two at 46.7S 170.9W on 29 May'01 and the last at 36.9S 170.6W.(NGC)

Northern Fulmar *Fulmarus glacialis.* DKB counted 27 singles and in groups in the southern North Sea at 51.1N 2.7E on 22 Feb'03 and five single birds at 51.9N 1.9E on 27 Feb'03. TJ recorded 12 off The Skaw On 6 May. DKB saw one in the Channel at 49.8N 0.2E on 1 Sept, two at 49.8N 1.0W on 2 Sept and 200 in a compact flock including one dark phase bird in the southern North Sea at 51.4N 1.8E on 20 Oct.

Southern Fulmar ***Fulmarus glacialoides.*** One was seen by DKB close to his ship in Brazilian coastal waters at 29.6S 49.3W, slightly north of usual range, on 25 Sept.

Cape Petrel ***Daption capense.*** Small numbers were recorded by DKB off southern Brazil with eight at 31.2S 50.5W on 25 Sept, two at 32.9S 51.7W on 30 Sept and three at 27S 48.2W on 1 Oct. GG recorded 60 at in the South Atlantic at 34.8S 50.8W on 13 Jul'65. Small numbers were observed most days between Wellington and 50S 170W and northwards along the 170W meridian during May/June'01. The maximum count was 35 at 44.1S 179.4E (sea temp 10.3C) on 25 May'01. Northbound the last was seen at 26.5S 170W on 11 June'01(sea temp 22.53C).(NGC)

Herald Petrel ***Pterodroma arminjoniana.*** GG described a probable bird seen in a gale in the SW Atlantic at 34S 40W on 11 July'65. The next day GG found one on board, salt encrusted but alive at 33.9S 43.7W. From the description it was an intermediate morph and had pink legs and webs with black toes. It recovered and was released the next day.

Great-winged Petrel ***Pterodroma macroptera.*** Sub-species *gouldi* seen most days in the Tasman Sea between Sydney and Wellington with tme of 30 at 35.8S 157.5E on 17 May'01, 25 at 36.6S 160E and 40 at 37S 161.5E. Small numbers were recorded most days SE and E of NZ with five at 41.6S 175E on 24 May'01, one at 48S 170W on 28 May'01, 10 at 32S 170W on 8 June'01 and the most northerly a single bird at 26.5S 170W on 11 June'01. Sea temperature range 10.78-22.54C. (NGC) DKB described one seen at 27.9S 48.3E off southern Brazil on 1 Oct.

White-headed Petrel ***Pterodroma lessonii.*** Recorded in the Tasman Sea with one at 35.9S 157.9E, two at 37S 161E and two at 38.6S 167E on the 17th,19th and 21st May'01. In the Chatham Islands area singles were recorded at 49S 171W and 49.2S 170.6W on 27 May'01, one at 48.3S 170W and two at 48S 170W on 28 May'01, two at 46.7S 170.9W on 29 May'01. Heading north along the 170W meridian singles or pairs were seen each day from 7-13 June'01, 33.9S to 23.2S where the sea temperature was 23.85C.(NGC)

Atlantic Petrel ***Pterodroma incerta.*** DKB reported one at 11.7S 36.9W off NE Brazil north of the normal range. On the shelfbreak approaching the R.Plate GG found them numerous on 13 Jul'65 counting 1600 in 5 hours.

Providence Petrel ***Pterodroma solandri.*** Single birds were seen in the western Tasman Sea at 34.5S 153.3E, 34.5S 153.4E on 15th and 35.2S 155.6E on 16 May'01(NGC)

Soft-plumaged Petrel ***Pterodroma mollis.*** A few records east of NZ with two at 46.6S 175.8W on 26 May'01, two at 46.7S 170.9W on 29 May'01, one at 38.6S 171.8W on 3 June'01, and the last one at 26.5S 170W on 11 June'01(sea temp 22.53C) (NGC)

Black-winged Petrel ***Pterodroma nigripennis.*** Merton & Bell (2003) heard and saw birds at Round Island, Mauritius, in December 1992 and 1994.

Bulwer's Petrel ***Bulweria bulwerii.*** DKB reported one put up by the ship at 32.1N 14W NE from the Canary Islands on 7 Sept. Further south in the tropical Atlantic he saw one flying SE

at 2.3N 25.1W and three flying SE at 3.8N 24.2W on 10 Oct and the next day one at 7.2N 21.7W. Merton & Bell (2003) report one with a bare brood patch was caught on Round Island, Mauritius on 18 June 1987, and that bird was found on an egg there on 7 Dec 1994, the first breeding record for the Indian Ocean.

Jouanin's Petrel ***Bulweria fallax.*** A record of two Jouanin's Petrels seen near Ashmore Reef off north western Australia and other sightings in the area are detailed by Carter (2003). It has now been found breeding on the eastern cliffs of Socotra (Taleb 2002).

SHEARWATERS *PROCELLARIINAE*

Grey Petrel ***Procellaria cinerea.*** Recorded every day from 24 May-8 June'01, Wellington to 50S 170W and north along 170 meridian mostly one or two per tme. Larger numbers included tme of 15 at 44.3S 173.8W and 15 at 43.8S 174.3W on 31 May'01, 10 at 42.2S 174.3W on 1 June'01. The last one was seen at 31.5S 170W on 8 June'01. Sea temp range 10.02-19.24C.(NGC)

White-chinned Petrel ***Procellaria aequinoctialis.*** It was seen south of 27S from Brazilian waters to the River Plate by DKB in Sept/Oct. Larger counts associated with fishing vessels were 710+ at 31.2S 50.5W on 25 Sept, 71 at 32.9S 51.7W on 30 Sept, 350 at 27.9S 48.3W and 17 at 27S 48.2W on 1 Oct. A few single birds were seen east of NZ by NGC with birds at 46.5S 175.9W on 26 May'01, 44.3S 173.8W on 31 May'01, 38.4S 171.6W on 4 June'01 and 36.9S 170.6W on 5 June'01.

Parkinson's Petrel ***Procellaria parkinsoni.*** One was seen at 35.3S 155.7E in the western Tasman Sea on 16 May'01(NGC)

Cory's Shearwater ***Calonectris diomedea.*** In the eastern Atlantic DKB recorded one at 37N 12.7W and four at 36.5N 12.9W on 3 March'03. The next day approaching the Canaries he saw nine singles around 30.9N 15.1W and eight at 28.8N 15.9W near Tenerife. Sailing along the wast coast of Lanzarote he saw 258 in groups on 6 Mar'03. TJ reported two from the equatorial Atlantic at 0.6S 36.6W on 18 May. DKB saw a group of 14 on the water at 46.4N 4.6W in the Bay of Biscay on the 3 Sept. Further south he saw 105 some with dolphins at 43.5N 10W off NW Spain on 5 Sept. In the equatorial Atlantic he saw nine flying south at 8.3N 21.3W on 12 Sept and three at 5N 23.8W the next day. He also saw single birds throughout the day NNE of the Canaries centred on 30.8N 14.3W on 16 Oct. In the Mediterranean SC recorded two north of Algeria at 37.1N 2.3E on 14 Sept. one at 37.5N 11.1E and 50+ at 36.8N 12.8E approaching Malta Channel on the 15 Sept.

Flesh-footed Shearwater ***Puffinus carneipes.*** One was seen off NSW at 35.5S 153.5E on 15 May'01(NGC)

Great Shearwater ***Puffinus gravis.*** Many records from the normal range. Interesting observations include:- 20+ seen by SC in the Western Approaches at 49.9N 8.5W on 9 Sept. DKB recorded a large movement in the equatorial Atlantic at 3.3N 24.9W on the 13 Sept. He counted 2536 birds in 4.6 hours moving in a wide column on a course of about 210T. As they overtook his ship steering 234T they almost all passed on the SE windward side frequently

approaching very close. He observed the SW passage in smaller numbers for the next two days between 0.1S 27.3W and 7.6S 33.6W. He also saw 138 at 29S 48.9W off southern Brazil on 25 Sept and 187 at 27.9S 48.3W on 1 Oct.

Sooty Shearwater ***Puffinus griseus.*** A number of Autumn records between Europe and Brazil from DKB including 20 at 27.9S 48.3W off Brazil on 1 Oct, three flying SE at 2.3N 25.1W and three more at 3.8N 24.2W in the Equatorial Atlantic on 10 Oct, 13 at 13.1N 18.3W off W.Africa on 12 Oct, 11 at 42N 10.1W off NW Spain on 18 Oct and single birds in the Channel at 50.4N 0.2E and 50.9N1.4E on 20 Oct. In the SW Pacific small numbers were seen SW of New Zealand and near the Chathams with two at 43.9S 178.9E, singles at 43.9S 179.1E, 44.2S 179.6E on 25 May.01, three at 46.5S 175.9W and two at 46.6S 175.8W on 26 May'01, singles at 49.1S 170.8W and 49S 170W on 27 May'01, two at 40.2S 172.9W on 2 June'01, one at 38.6S 171.8W on 3 June'01 and the last east of the Kermadecs at 30S 170W on 9 June'01.(NGC)

Short-tailed Shearwater ***Puffinus tenuirostris.*** Two at 36.9S 151.5E off NSW on 13 May'01.(NGC)

Manx Shearwater ***Puffinus puffinus.*** Many records from DKB between NW Europe and West Africa on to Brazil and return from 5 Sept until 10 Oct. Concentrations of birds were seen in Brazilian waters from late Sept with 66 at 29S 48.9W,225 at 29.6S 49.3W and 664 at 31.2S 50.5W on 25th, 65 at 32.9S 51.7W on 30th, and 24 at 27.9S 48.3W and 260 at 27S 48.2W on 1 Oct. Southward passage of small numbers of birds was noted in the tropical Atlantic from 5 to 10 Oct with 75 recorded at 2.3N 25.1W on 10th. DKB also recorded one north of the Canaries at 30.9N 15.1W on 4 March'03.

Balearic Shearwater ***Puffinus mauretanicus.*** DKB reported one at 43.8N 8.2W off NW Spain on 5 Sept.

Little Shearwater ***Puffinus assimilis.*** DKB recorded 11 singly and in groups at 30.9N 15.1W north of the Canaries on 4 Mar'03 and one at 36N 12.6W off Portugal on 6 Sept. Merton & Bell (2003) report a bird which from its size belonged to the Western Australian race *tunneyi* on 8 Sep 1986. Another shearwater caught there in 1988 and attributed to *Puffinus l' herminieri bailloni* was small for that form and could be the same.

Audubon's Shearwater ***Puffinus l'herminieri.*** GG reported 'hundreds' at 11N 51.7E SW from Socotra on 6 Sept'52 and 40+ when approaching the west coast of India at 17.1N 70E on 8 Aug '58.

STORM-PETRELS ***HYDROBATIDAE***

Wilson's Storm-petrel ***Oceanicus oceanites.*** In the Atlantic DKB saw a group of eight at 0.1S 27.3W on 14 Sept and one NNE of the Canaries at 30.8N 14.3W on 16 Oct. GG saw 30 in the southern Bay of Bengal at 8.4N 88.3E on 15 Aug '58 and had up to 50+ following his ship west of Sri Lanka at 7.3N 77.7E on 23 Sept'58.

New Zealand Storm-petrel ***Oceanites maorianus.*** This form, known only from three specimens of uncertain origin taken in the 19th century, and dismissed as a colour-phase of Wilson's Storm-petrel, has now been photographed twice in the vicinity of the Hauraki Gulf, NE New Zealand - one south of the Mercury Islands 25 Jan (Saville *et al.* 2003), and a number north of Little Barrier Island on 17 Nov 2003 (Flood 2003). It is similar to Wilson's Storm-petrel in size and proportions but has a streaked white breast and no pale patches on the webs. It appears to be a distinct species presumably breeding in this area.

Tristram's Storm-petrel ***Oceanodroma tristrami.*** The first bird of this North Pacific species reported in the Southern Hemisphere was photographed at 34.2°S 151.6°E off Sydney by Tony Palliser (2002) on 9 October 2002.

Grey-backed Storm-petrel ***Garrodia nereis.*** They were recorded east of NZ in the Chatham Is area with two at 46.8S 175.5W on 26 May'01, singles at 49S 171W and 49.1S 170.8W and one aboard at 48.9S 171.2W on 27 May'01, three at 44.1S 173.9E and one at 43.8S 174.3E on 31 May'01 and three at 42.2S 174.3W on 1 June'01. Sea temp. range 10.76-14.17C.(NGC)

White-faced Storm-petrel ***Pelagodroma marina.*** GG reported one at 14.7N 65.8E in the southern Arabian Sea on 7 Aug'58 and two at 5.5N 94E near northern Sumatera on 19 Sept'58. DKB saw five singles in the area 30.9N 15.1W, one at 30.4N 15.3W north of the Canaries on 4 March'03 and two at 5.4S 31.9W on 15 Sept.

White-bellied Storm-petrel ***Fregetta grallaria.*** DKB recorded three in the tropical Atlantic at 5.4S 31.9W on 15 Sept. In the Indian Ocean GG reported one at 9.3N 56.8E on 5 Aug'58 and another at 11.2N 60.3E the next day.

Black-bellied Storm-petrel ***Fregetta tropica.*** Singles were seen at 35.8S 157.5E, 35.9S 157.7E and two at 36.4S 159.6E in the Tasman Sea on the 17 and 18 May'01.(NGC)

Madeiran Storm-petrel ***Oceanodroma castro.*** DKB reported 42 in groups at 23.9N 16.9W SSE from the Canaries on 8 Sept and one nearby at 22.8N 17.3W on the 15 Oct. Further south he saw two at 7.2N 21.7W and 27 singles and in groups at 9N 20.9W on 11 Oct.

TROPICBIRDS *PHAETHONTIDAE*

Red-billed Tropic Bird ***Phaethon aethereus.*** GG descibed 20+ all flying NW at 11.4N SSE from Socotra on 26 Sept'58 and another in the southern Red Sea at c. 15N 42E on the 22 Aug'64.

PELICANS *PELICANIDAE*

Eastern White Pelican ***Pelecanus onocrotalus.*** DKB recorded 720+ following trawlers at 13.4N 16.9W almost out of sight of land off Banjul Gambia on 11 Sept.

GANNETS AND BOOBIES *SULIDAE*

Northern Gannet ***Morus bassanus.*** Numerous records from western European waters including 350 most around a fishing vessel at 51.1N 2.7E in the southern North Sea on 22 Feb'03.(DKB)

Australasian Gannet ***Morus serrator.*** An immature in mid Tasman Sea at 34.6S 160E on 18 May'01 and an adult at 37S 161.5E the following day.(NGC)

Masked Booby ***Sula dactylatra.*** One at Fortaleza, Brazil(3.6S) anchorage on 19 May.(TJ) DKB had several records from the tropical Atlantic and sub-tropical Brazilian waters including 2 Adults feeding on flying fish at 2S 29.3W on 14 Sept. 6 adults at 5.4S 31.9W On 15 Sept. 19 adults at 17.3S 38.2 W on 18 Sept, three adults at 17.1S 37.3W on 6 Oct and one at 1.7S 27.6W on 9 Oct. In the SW Pacific one adult at 30S 170W 415nm east of Kermadec Is on 9 June'01 and one sub-adult at 23.2S 170W SE from Tonga on 13 June'01.(NGC)

Brown Booby ***Sula leucogaster.*** DKB observed 11 near the Brazilian coast at 17.3S 38.2W on 18 Sept feeding on flying fish put up by the ship. He saw 200+ in Rio Harbour on 21 Sept and 100 around small fishing boats off Rio at 23.3S 43.8W on 4 Oct, 16 approaching Santos at 24S 45.9W and 40+ at the anchorage on 22 Sept. He also saw 50+ at Paranagua Roads 25.5S 48.5E and 370+ flying out of Paranagua Lagoon in groups of 20 on evening of 1 Oct.

Red-footed Booby ***Sula sula.*** One white-tailed brown morph and a brown bird in the tropical Atlantic at 5.4S 31.9W on 15 Sept and another at 4S 29W on 9 Oct.(DKB)

Adult Double-Crested Cormorant *(Phalacrocorax auritus)*, Fort Myers Beach, Florida, USA, 7 Nov 1994. *Photo:* Sam Alexander.

CORMORANTS *PHALACROCORACIDAE*

Great Cormorant ***Phalacrocorax carbo.*** Several hundred flying over in groups at Dakar with 40 adults offshore at 14.5N 17.3W on 10 Sept and 200 there on 13 Oct.(DKB)

Olivaceous Cormorant ***Phalacrocorax brasilanus.*** DKB saw 100+ in Rio Harbour on 21 Sept, 200+ at Parangua Roads on 24 Sept, 500+ at a tree roost at Paranagua on 2 Oct, 14 off Buenos Aires on 27 Sept and 50 at Montevideo on 29 Sept.

Socotra Cormorant ***Leucocarbo nigrogularis.*** In the Arabian Gulf SC reported single birds at 24.5N 52.5E on 22 Feb'03, at 29.6N 48.9E on 26 Mar'03 and at 29.6N 48.9E on 29 Mar'03.

FRIGATEBIRDS *FREGATIDAE*

Magnificent Frigatebird ***Fregata magnificens.*** DKB observed 300 at Rio Roads on 21 Sept, 300 over an island at the harbour entrance and 'hundreds' in Rio inner harbour on 4 Oct. He found the species numerous elsewhere along the Brazilian coast with 50+ at 24S 45.9W approaching Santos and 100+ at Santos roads on 21 Sept, 50+ at Paranagua Roads on 24 Sept and 196 around small fishing boats and boobies at 24.3S 44.3W later same day, 33 at 23S 42.6W and 30 at 22.8S 41.6W on 5 Oct.

Ascension Frigatebird ***Fregata aquila.*** A young frigatebird collected on Tiree in the Inner Hebrides on 10 July 1953, and identified as the last species, has now been reidentified as this one, the only reliable record away from the vicinity of Ascension. There are some useful notes on the immature plumage, when it usually has a white head and dark band across the breast (Walbridge *et al* 2003).

PHALAROPES *PHALAROPODIDAE*

Red-necked Phalarope ***Phalaropus lobatus.*** GG passed many groups, about 1000 birds in all over calm seas in 1.5 hours at 11N 52.2E off Cape Gardafui on 8 Jan'62 and saw 20 more when approaching Aden the following day.

Adult Female Red-necked Phalarope *(Phalaropus lobatus)* Churchill, Manitoba, Canada, 11 June 1991. *Photo:* Sam Alexander

Phalarope Sp. were identified DKB who saw one at 23.9N 16.9W SSE of the Canaries on 8 Sept, three departing south and a single at 23.5S 17.1W nearby on the 15 Oct and 15 flying south at 9.7N 20.2W SW of the Gambia on 12 Sept.

SKUAS AND JAEGERS ***STERCORARIINI***

Great Skua ***Catharacta skua.*** Several records from DKB from the Channel, Bay of Biscay and west Iberian coast including 10 in 3.9 hours around 47.8N 5.7W approaching Ushant on 19 Oct and 14 in groups and singles at 37.3N 9.1W off southern Portugal on 10 March'03. Further south he saw singles at 13.1N 18.3W and 14.2N 17.7W off Senegal on 12 Oct and one heading north at 28.6N 14.3W near Lanzarote on 6 Mar'03.

Southern Skua ***Catharacta (skua) antarctica.*** A few records from DKB from coastal waters off Brazil and Uruguay with one at 24.2S 44.3W on 24 Sept, one at 29S 48.9W and 29.6S 49.3W on 25 Sept, six at 35.1S 56.2W on 26 Sept, three at 27.9S 48.3W and the last at 22S 40.7W on 5 Oct.

Brown Skua ***Catharacta (skua) lonnbergi.*** One off Cape Barren Island at 40.3S 149.5E on 12 May'01 and three singles E and SE of the Chatham Islands at 49.5S 170W on 27 May, 46.7S 170.9W on 29 May and at 45.5S 172.5W on 30 May'01.(NGC)

South Polar Skua ***Catharacta maccormicki.*** Two light morph birds were reported by DKB from 20.7S 40.3W off Brazil on 29 Sept.

Pomarine Skua ***Stercorarius pomarinus.*** SC saw three at Kuwait anchorage on 1 May. GG recorded two at 6.2N 80E near Sri Lanka on 21 Sept'58. In the Atlantic DKB saw one at 3.8N 24.2W on 10 Oct and a light phase bird at 39.6N 12.2W on 17 Oct.

Adult Antarctic Skua *(Catharacta antarctica)* incubating, Pebble Island, Falkland Islands, 28 Nov 1996. *Photo:* Sam Alexander

Arctic Skua ***Stercorarius parasiticus.*** DKB had several autumn records between Europe West Africa and Brazil with a single off NW Spain at 43.8N 8.2W on 5th, another at 23.9N 16.9W near Mauretania on 8th and three at Vitoria Roads on 19 Sept. Northbound in October he saw two at 4S 29W and one with Sooty terns at 3.8N 24.2W on 9th and 10th and three birds at 14.2N 17.7W on 12th. Late birds were a single at 47.8N 5.7W approaching Ushant on 19th and one in the Channel at 50.4N 0.2E on 20 Oct. In the Persian Gulf SC saw two heading north at 29.6N 48.9E on 29 March'03.

Long-tailed Skua ***Stercorarius longicaudus.*** One adult at 14.2N 17.7W off Senegal and another with Sabine's Gulls NW of Spain at 42.4N 10W on 18 Oct.(DKB)

GULLS *LARIDAE*

Common Gull ***Larus canus.*** DKB found Common Gull the most numerous gull in Hamburg and the Elbe estuary when departing on 25 Feb'03 and saw 102 mostly adults at 54N 8.3E in the German Bight later the same day.

Lesser Black-backed Gull ***Larus fuscus.*** DKB recorded 50+ in Cadiz harbour on 9 March'03 and the next day c.1000 around a fishing vessel at 37.3N 9.1W off southern Portugal. He also saw 100+ at Bilbao Harbour on 4 Sept. all seen closely were the western Baltic race *intermedius,* three adults at 13.4N 16.9 W off the Gambia on 11 Sept and a juvenile bird on board in the Equatorial Atlantic at 9.1N 20.8W on 11 Oct.

Yellow-legged Gull ***Larus cachinnans.***DKB recorded 200+ in Cadiz harbour on 9 March'03, 30+ *L.c.atlantis* at Tenerife on 4 March'03, 250+ atlantis flying out to sea at Las Palmas roads on 6 March'03 and c.700 *L.c.michahellis* in Bilbao Hr on 4 Sept'02.

Herring Gull ***Larus argentatus.***A large concentration of birds around a single fishing vessel at 50.6N 0.3E south of Beachy Head included 1600 mainly adult Herring Gulls, 150 Northern Gannet, 100 Adult Lesser Black-backed Gull, 20 Adult Great Black-backed Gull, 150 Adult/ imm Black-legged Kittiwake and 50 Common Guillemot.(DKB)

Great Black-backed Gull ***Larus marinus.*** DKB recorded a few most days between Ushant and the southern North Sea, Aug and October.

Kelp Gull ***Larus dominicanus.*** Heading south along the Brazilian coast DKB found the northern limit of distribution Rio Harbour (23S) with 50+ birds on 21 Sept and on his return the last two adults were seen nearby at 22.8S 41.7W on 5 Oct. He also recorded 200 mostly adults in Santos Harbour(24S) on 22 Sept, 100+ at Paranagua roads (25.5S) on 24 Sept, 22 adults singles and groups when approaching the R.Plate at 34.9S 54.5W on 26 Sept and 1000+ in Montevideo Harbour on 29 Sept.

White-eyed Gull ***Larus leucophthalmus.*** GG recorded several at Port Said anchorage on 1 Oct'55 and hundreds along the Suez Canal the following day.

Sooty Gull ***Larus hemprichi.*** Heading south from Mombassa during Nov'61 GG found Mtwara (10.2S) the southern limit of this species.

Mediterranean Gull ***Larus melanocephalus.*** Two adults were seen by DKB in Cadiz Harbour on 9 March'03 and the next day he saw single adults at 37.3N 9.1W and 38.6N 9.6W off southern Portugal.

Grey-headed Gull ***Larus cirrocephalus.*** DKB recorded 200+ at Banjul Gambia (13.5N) on 11 Sept, three following his ship at 35.1S 56.2W in the R. Plate estuary on 26 Sept, a group of eight at Buenos Aires Roads the next day and one at Montevideo Harbour on 29 Sept.

Black-headed Gull ***Larus ridibundus.*** SC saw 20+ at 28.6N 48.6E off Kuwait on 28 Feb'03. DKB recorded 13 Adults with dolphins at 46.4N 4.6W in the Bay of Biscay on 3 Sept and 100+ at Bilbao the next day. He also saw five adults off Las Palmas and 100+ at Cadiz on the 6th and 9th of March'03.

Adult Black-headed Gull *(Larus ridibundus)* in winter plumage. Fraserburgh, 27 August 2001. *Photo:* Sam Alexander.

Brown-hooded Gull ***Larus maculpennis.*** One adult and three imm were seen at Buenos Aires roads on 27 Sept and 10 Ad/imm were off Montevideo on 29 Sept.

Slender -billed Gull ***Larus genei.*** SC had up to 20 around his ship whilst at anchor at 28.6N 48.6E off Kuwait on 28 Feb'03.

Little Gull ***Larus minutus.*** DKB recorded 14 Adults and one imm around a dredge in R.Elbe near Hamburg on 29 Aug and eight the next day at 51.4N 3.5E in the approaches to the R. Scheldt.

Sabine's Gull ***Larus sabini.*** During the autumn passage DKB saw one adult at 14.2N 17.7W off Senegal on 12 Oct, three flying south at 23.5N 17.1W on 15 Oct and a substantial movement of four groups totalling 284 birds around 42.4N 10.0W off NW Spain on 18 Oct.

Black-legged Kittiwake ***Rissa tridactyla.*** In the southern North Sea DKB recorded 10 Adults and two imm at 52.3N 3.9E off the Hook of Holland on 26 Feb'03 and the next day saw five adults and five imm approaching Felixstowe at 51.9N 1.9E. TJ recorded two at 37.5N 13.6W on 10 May.

TERNS *STERNIDAE*

Black Tern ***Childonias nigra.*** Ten adults at Dakar and one nearby at 14.5N 17.3W on 10 Sept and 50 at Banjul Gambia with 28 nearby at 13.4N 16.9W on 11 Sept.(DKB)

Caspian Tern ***Sterna caspia.*** Three at Banjul and 13 nearby at 13.4N 16.9W on 11 Sept.

South American Tern ***Sterna hirundinacea.*** On the Brazilian coast DKB saw 50 in the Vitoria harbour channel (20.3S) on 19 Sept. It was numerous at Rio on 21 Sept and 4 Oct, further south he saw singles at 24S 45.9W on 22 Sept, at 29.6S 49.3W on 25 Sept with five nearby at 31.2S 50.5W the same day and a single at 33.6S 52.3W off Uraguay on 30 Sept.

Common Tern ***Sterna hirundo.*** A few reports from DKB from around the North and South Atlantic with one at Cadiz on 9 March'03, one at 14.5N 17.3W off Dakar on 10 Sept, two at Vitoria on 19 Sept, five at 31.2S 50.5W off southern Brazil on 25 Sept.

Arctic Tern ***Sterna paradisaea.*** Recorded by DKB from the equatorial Atlantic with 76 flying south at 9.7N 20.2W on 12 Sept, 10 flying south at 4.3N 24.3W the next day. A few days later larger groups were seen off South America with 116 at 29S 48.9W, 75+ at 29.6S 49.3W and 419 at 31.2S 50.5W on 25 Sept. These birds were in winter/juv plumage and were considered mostly paradisaea. The next day he saw c.196 approaching R.Plate estuary at 34.9S 54.5W.

White-cheeked Tern ***Sterna repressa.*** In the Persian Gulf SC saw 40+ whist at anchor off Bahrein on 21 April'03, seven at 29.2 N 49.1E on 24 April'03 and 40+ at Kuwait anchorage on 30 April and 1 May'03. GG saw very large numbers of Caspian and White-cheeked Terns passing in a wide line in the southern Red Sea at 15.3N 42.3E on 8 Sept'52. He also recorded many thousands of White-cheeked, Crested, and Bridled Terns with a few Sandwich, Little and Caspian Terns off Mocha (Lat 13.3N) on 4 Oct'55.

Bridled Tern ***Sterna anaethetus.*** SC saw four at 29.1N 49.1E in the Persian Gulf on 24 April'03 and 30+ feeding at Kuwait anchorage on 30 April'03. DKB reported two at 19.3N 17.7W off Mauretania on 9 Sept.

Sooty Tern ***Sterna fuscata.*** DKB saw 3 groups in the equatorial Atlantic with 110 at 1.6N 25.5W, 88 at 2.3N 25.1W and 52 at 3.8N 24.2W all on 10 Oct, c.80% adult 20% juv, flying SE low over the water.

Saunder's Tern ***Sterna saundersi.*** SC recorded one at 29.1N 49.1E in the Persian Gulf.

Swift Tern ***Sterna bergii.*** Two adults 22 nm east of Botany Bay NSW on 14 May'01.

Royal Tern ***Sterna maxima.*** DKB saw 11 adults at 14.5N 17.3W off Dakar on 10 Sept, one nearby at 14.2N 17.7W on 12 Oct and ten at Dakar the next day.He saw 10 at Banjul and 283 singles and groups at 13.4N 16.9W on 11 Sept. He also recorded four at 35.1S 556.2W in R.Plate estuary on 26 Sept.

Lesser Crested Tern ***Sterna bengalensis.*** GG saw many at Port Sudan on 7 March'51.

Sandwich Tern ***Sterna sandvicensis.*** DKB recorded 23 flying north off Lanzarote on 6 March'03 and 50 at Cadiz on 9 March'03. He also had five adults at Banjul Gambia on 11 Sept and 50 in Dakar harbour on 13 Oct. SC saw three on driftwood when sailing from La Goulette Tunisia on 2 Oct.

Cayenne Tern ***Sterna eurygnatha.***Thirty in Vitoria harbour channel on 19 Sept, and six off Paranagua on 2 Oct. (DKB)

SKIMMERS ***RYNCHOPINI***

Black Skimmer ***Rynchops nigra.*** DKB saw eight at Paranagua Harbour on 24 Sept and another eight there on 2 Oct.

AUKS ***ALCIDAE***

Razorbill ***Alca torda.*** Two at 51.1N 2.7E in southern North Sea on 22Feb'03(DKB)

Guillemot ***Uria aalge.*** In the North Sea DKB saw nine at 51.1N 2.7E and 10 at 51.9N 3E on 22 Feb'03, 11 at 54N 8.3E in the German Bight on 25 Feb'03, 27 in singles and groups at 52.3N 3.9E off Hook of Holland on 26 Feb'03, 27 at 51.9N 1.9E the next day and 34 at 50.7N 0.6E SE from Beachy head on 28 Feb'03.

Puffin ***Fratercula arctica.*** One in southern North Sea at 51.9N 1.9E on 27 Feb'03(DKB).

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Spectacled Petrel *(Procellaria conspicillata)*, Inaccessible Island, S Atlantic, April 2003. *Photo:* S Hales.

Sea Swallow 52 (2003)

FURTHER BIRD OBSERVATIONS FROM DIEGO GARCIA 4-5 DECEMBER 2002

by WO1 (RSM) P Carr BSc (Hons) Royal Marines

Introduction

Sea Swallow has published several articles detailing the ornithological sightings of RNBWS members who have been fortunate enough to visit the atolls of the Chagos Archipelago (Pocklington 1967; Curtis 1975; Howells 1983; Cochrane 1992; Carr, 1996, 1998, 2000). These records are extremely valuable due to the paucity of published material detailing the status, or even occurrence, of birds in this area. Even after the seminal 1996 Chagos Expedition, the most comprehensive research project undertaken to date in the region (Sheppard et al, 1999), vast gaps in our ornithological knowledge remain.

I had the good fortune of revisiting Diego Garcia on 04 / 05 December 2002. Although this visit was pure business, a rainy couple of hours were spent recording birds at Shark's Cove, the Turtle Cove area and the Airfield; incidental records were collected elsewhere throughout the trip. The following observations are published here to add to the important collection of avifaunal records of this under-researched region held by RNBWS.

General Observations

In comparison to previous visits, of immediate note was the increase in number of Domestic Fowl *(Gallus gallus)* ranging around the accommodation area, the apparent increase in this species is discussed further in the systematic review. Cattle Egret *(Bubulcus ibis)* had unquestionably declined since 1997; a count of over 200 birds would be expected on any trip passing the airfield in 1997 (Carr, 2000), no more than 50 birds were counted on the entire atoll on this trip. The Glossy Ibis *(Plegadis falcinellus)* noted in 1996 and 1997 was not relocated. A single female Amur Falcon *(Falco amurensis)* was recorded on 4 Dec 02. This bird is likely to be one of two Amur Falcons first seen on Diego Garcia on 2 Dec 02 (Jewell pers comm.) and is thought to be the first confirmed and published record of this species from the Chagos Archipelago. Of conservation and scientific value, as expected (Carr 98, Symens 99), Red-footed Booby *(Sula sula)* was confirmed as breeding in December.

Systematic Observations

Red-footed Booby ***Sula sula.*** An estimated 50 - 80 birds were breeding on West Island, assessed by Apparently Occupied Nests (Bibby *et al* 1992) viewed from Eclipse Point. The other known breeding areas on or near Diego Garcia, consisting of Middle and East Island and the Barton Point sanctuary area were not visited. A steady stream of hundreds of birds of all ages were watched returning to West, Middle and East Island at sunset on 4 Dec 02.

Frigatebird ***Fregata sp.*** Up to 10 frigatebirds were noted over West Island at sunset on 4 Dec 02, no specific identification was possible due to light and range.

Little Green Heron ***Butorides striatus.*** This species was found all over Diego Garcia in small numbers in suitable habitat. 14 birds were recorded on 4 Dec 02 between the Plantation and the Airfield.

Cattle Egret *Bubulcus ibis*. A striking difference between previous visits and this trip was the decline in Cattle Egret numbers throughout the atoll. Less than 50 birds were counted on a drive from the Plantation area to Eclipse Point on 4 Dec 02. 200 birds would have been expected in 1997 (Carr, 2000). This appears to be a genuine decline in numbers as this species is easy to count on Diego Garcia: in 1996 and 97 it inhabited open grassy areas that are limited in number and was generally found in loose flocks of 10 - 60 birds.

Duck *Anser sp*. The British Representative, Cdr P Adams RN stated a small party of ducks had been seen on Diego Garcia infrequently in 2002. The area where they had been seen was thoroughly searched to no avail. Cdr Adams stated that he had been told the ducks were 'Australian Shelducks' (*Tadorna tadornoides*?). Due to their relatively sedentary nature and geographic distribution (southern Australia) this specie of shelduck is unlikely to occur in the Chagos, unless deliberately introduced. The mainly migratory, primarily Asian, Ruddy Shelduck (*Tadorna ferruginea*) would be a far more likely candidate from the *Tadorna* group.

(Manchurian or Eastern Red-footed) Amur Falcon *Falco amurensis*. The British Representative also stated two falcons had recently been found on Diego Garcia, one of which was subsequently located on 4 Dec 02 and identified as an Amur Falcon. From photographs, this bird was identified as a female in at least her second summer (T Codlin pers comm.). This bird is undoubtedly one of two falcons that were identified by Cdr C Jewett USN as Amur Falcons on 2 Dec 02 and later photographed by JO1 J. L. Wood. An article covering the appearance of one of the birds, including a photograph, has been published in the *Tropical Times* (6 Dec 02). It is rumoured that the second falcon was killed in a bird strike and is presently residing in a deep freezer on Diego Garcia. The two birds identified by Cdr Jewett are thought to be the first confirmed and published records of Amur Falcon from the Chagos.

Amur Falcon (*Falco amurensis*), Diego Garcia Dec 2002. . *Photo:* J Wood.

Domestic Fowl ***Gallus gallus.*** There has been a drive to eradicate cats from Diego Garcia (Gorrie pers comm) and cat traps are to be found around the atoll. The success of the cat eradication programme is possibly the reason that Domestic Fowl numbers appear to have dramatically increased since 1997. At least 100 birds, ranging from roosters to day old chicks were counted around the accommodation area on 5 Dec 02.

White-breasted Waterhen ***Amaurornis phoenicurus.*** Located on damp patches around the atoll, no evidence of breeding was seen. There appeared to be no significant change in population numbers since the survey in 1997 (Carr, 2000).

Grey Plover ***Pluvialis squatarola.*** A single winter plumaged bird was seen at Shark's Cove on 4 Dec 02.

Greater Sand Plover ***Charadrius leschenaulti.*** Three winter plumaged birds were foraging in Shark's Cove on 4 Dec 02.

Whimbrel ***Numenius phaeopus.*** Frequently seen on grassy open areas, a minimum of 23 birds were noted as present on the atoll on 4 Dec 02.

Common Greenshank ***Tringa nebularia.*** A single winter plumaged bird was present at Shark's Cove on 4 Dec 02.

Common Sandpiper ***Actitis hypoleucos.*** A single bird was seen flying and heard calling around Simpson Point on 4 Dec 02.

Ruddy Turnstone ***Arenaria interpres.*** A minimum of 40 birds were present on Diego Garcia on 4 Dec 02.

Curlew Sandpiper ***Calidris ferruginea.*** Numerically the commonest wader on the atoll, a minimum 80 birds were present on 4 Dec 02.

Indian Barred Ground-dove ***Geopelia striata.*** Seen throughout the atoll, this species was seen more frequently away from human habitation than Madagascar Turtle Dove. A minimum of 30 birds were recorded between Shark's Cove and Eclipse Point on 4 Dec 02.

Madagascar Turtle Dove ***Streptopelia picturata.*** Common around the accommodation area, a minimum of 30 birds were noted in this area on 5 Dec 02.

Indian Mynah ***Acridotheres tristis.*** Very common (100s) throughout the atoll.

Madagascar Fody ***Foudia madagascariensis.*** Very common throughout the atoll. Some 200 birds of mixed age were feeding on the grass around the accommodation area on 5 Dec 02. Two large and vocal communal roosts were noted in trees in the accommodation area at sun down on 5 Dec 02.

Non-Avian Observations

Donkeys are still present on the atoll, the centre of population being the open fields containing the arials and masts at the southern end of the atoll. Five adult donkeys were grazing in the fields on 4 Dec 02.

Rats were recorded from everywhere visited. Whilst no quantative data can be submitted, in comparison to previous trips to Diego Garcia in 1996 and 1997, rats appeared to have massively increased. In the report covering Diego Survey 97 (Part One), it was stated rats 'were seen at least every kilometre up the track that runs from Minni Minni to Barton Point.' On the drive to Minni Minni from the accommodation area in 1997 it would have been unusual to observe two rats over the whole distance. On 4 Dec 02, once past the airfield, up to three rats per kilometre were noted running across the road in front of the vehicle all the way to Shark's Cove. In the undergrowth just off the main road, rats were extremely abundant and very evident, away from the accommodation area.

A rat poisoning programme is ongoing, certainly around the living quarters, ran in tandem with the cat eradication project that is taking place throughout the atoll. The long term effects of this programme, particularly on the seabird populations at Barton Point, would be very interesting to monitor.

Acknowledgements

On Diego Garcia, I would like to thank the British Representative, Cdr P Adams RN for taking the time and trouble to discuss matters ornithological with me. I would particularly like to thank WO2 Ronnie Gorrie RM for being an excellent host and guide. Cdr Jewett USN and JO1 Wood were extremely helpful regarding the Amur Falcon. In UK, Trevor Codlin was his usual thorough and knowledgeable self, regarding sexing the Amur Facon.

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Yellow-nosed Albatross *(Diomedea chlororhyncos)*
Gough Island, April 2003, *Photo:* S Hales.

Sea Swallow 52 (2003)

SEABIRD OBSERVATIONS BETWEEN CAPE TOWN AND ASCENSION ISLAND - OCTOBER 2000 AND DECEMBER 2001

by Beau W. Rowlands

Introduction

This account takes in my sixth and seventh visits to St Helena (16S 5.7W) and fifth visit to Ascension Island (7.9S 14.4W). Observations are from two voyages, RMS *St Helena*, 11 to 24 October 2000 and 3 to 8 and 22 to 27 December 2001. The first was from Cape Town through to Cardiff, calling at St Helena (six days) and Ascension Island (four hours). The second was a round trip to St Helena from Cape Town, with a fortnight on the island (Rowlands 2002a, b). The ship's speed averaged 15 knots. Using the ten-minute card system, observations were taken daily, mainly at 0800, 1200 and 1700 hrs - see Rowlands (1992). However, while most remained uninterrupted one-hour counts, a few were in 30-minute periods, but the total for a full day at sea was not below three hours. Times given are GMT.
This forms an update to Rowlands (1991, 1992, 1995, 2001, 2002a, b), Rowlands *et al.* (1998) and Rowlands & Trueman (1999). Records from St Helena's off-shore stacks are included.

Brown Noddies *(Anous stolidus)* George Island, St Helena, 6 February 1992.
Photo: BW Rowlands.

Species Accounts

A total of 40 species were identified, plus an unidentified albatross and tern. Of these, 34 were seen in October 2000, and 30 in December 2001.

Jackass Penguin *Spheniscus demersus*. Large rafts, several hundred, were seen inside and outside Cape Town Docks on departure, 3 Dec 2001. Three were seen together east of Dassen Island, near Cape Town, on return, 27 Dec.

Wandering Albatross ***Diomedea exulans***. Two birds were seen following the ship on 13 Oct 2000, one adult bird, one young bird, latter northernmost at 25.3S 6.7E.

Small albatross sp ***Diomedea*** sp. One unidentified 'mollymawk' was seen at 31.1S 14.9E, 12 Oct 2000.

Black-browed Albatross ***Diomedea melanophris***. Two birds were seen at 30.9S 14.7E, 12 Oct 2000. Singles were seen on 4, 5 and 26 Dec, 2001, northernmost 26.3S 7.6E (5 Dec). The last was over a small fish shoal (where a marlin jumped), at 30.9S 14.8E.

Grey-headed Albatross ***Diomedea chrysostoma***. One was seen at 30.5S 14.1E, 26 Dec 2001.

Yellow-nosed Albatross ***Diomedea chlororhynchos***. One was seen at 28S 10.9E, 25 Dec 2001.

Shy Albatross ***Diomedea cauta***. Seen on 12 and 14 Oct, 2000, northernmost at 21.4S 1.4E, highest count two birds (12 Oct).

Northern Giant Petrel ***Macronectes halli***. One was seen at 31S 14.8E, 12 Oct 2000.

Cape Petrel ***Daption capense***. One was seen, with six Kelp Gulls, on water, between Robben Island and Dassen Island, off Cape Town, 11 Oct 2000. Singles were also seen on 12, 13 and 14 Oct, northernmost at 22.1S 2.4E.

Great-winged Petrel ***Pterodroma macroptera***. In 2000 seen on 13 and 14 Oct, northernmost at 22.4S 2.8E, highest count three birds (13 Oct). In 2001 seen on 3, 4, 5, 24, 25 and 26 Dec, northernmost at 23S 3.5E (24 Dec), highest count seven birds (26 Dec).

Atlantic Petrel ***Pterodroma incerta***. One was seen at 30.9S 14.7E, 12 Oct 2000.

Soft-plumaged Petrel ***Pterodroma mollis***. Singles were seen, on 12, 13 and 14 Oct 2000, northernmost at 21.5S 1.5E, and off Cape Town (NW of Dassen Island) on 3 Dec 2001.

White-chinned Petrel ***Procellaria aequinoctialis***. In 2000 seen on 12, 13, 14 and 15 Oct, northernmost at 19.4S 1.3W, highest count six birds (12 Oct). In 2001 seen off Cape Town on 3 and 27 Dec, highest count three birds (3 Dec) NW of Dassen Island.

Spectacled Petrel ***Procellaria conspicillata***. One was seen at 26.8S 8.7E, 13 Oct 2000.

Grey Petrel ***Procellaria cinerea***. There were two counts, four birds and a single, at 31.5S 15.6E, 26 Dec 2001. They were close to four Sperm Whales, which the ship was slowly circling to observe.

Cory's Shearwater ***Calonectris diomedea***. Singles were seen on 12, 13 and 14 Oct 2000, northernmost at 21.7S 1.9E. On 26 Dec 2001 there were two counts, of three and 200+ birds, the former over a small fish shoal (where marlin jumped) at 30.9S 14.8E, and the latter a raft of birds actively preying on a much larger shoal of fish at 31.5S 15.7E.

Great Shearwater ***Puffinus gravis*****.** Two singles were seen, 12 Oct 2000, the northernmost at 30.4S 13.7E.

Sooty Shearwater ***Puffinus griseus*****.** Singles were seen on 3 and 4 Dec 2001, a group of three birds was flushed from the water on 25 Dec, and three were seen together also on 26 Dec, northernmost at 27.7S 10.4E (25 Dec).

Madeiran Storm-petrel ***Oceanodroma castro*****.** *At sea:* Singles were seen 103 and 323 nautical miles SE of St Helena, 22 and 23 Dec 2001. *At St Helena:* Five birds were seen over Speery Island, 18 Oct 2000, and one off Flagstaff, 18 Dec 2001. Present on Egg Island, in three nesting holes found in scree above the defunct Cockburn Battery (three cannon), 18 Oct 2000, calling (pers. obs.), and again three holes on 18 Dec 2001, with distinctive petrel smell and other signs of occupancy (R. Hindle pers. comm.). The population appears to be stable, but counts are problematic due to the mainly nocturnal movements of this species.

Wilson's Storm-petrel ***Oceanites oceanicus*****.** Seen on 12, 13, 14 and 15 Oct 2000, northernmost at 17.7S 3.4W, highest counts two birds each. Singles were seen on 5, 24 and 26 Dec 2001, northernmost at 23S 3.5E (24 Dec).

White-bellied Storm-petrel ***Fregetta grallaria*****.** One was seen at 18.7S 2.3W, 7 Dec 2001.

Red-billed Tropic-bird ***Phaethon aethereus*****.** *At sea:* A single bird was seen on 7 Dec 2001, 385 nm SE of St Helena. *At Ascension:* A few were seen off Georgetown, 24 Oct 2000. *At St Helena:* A few were seen off Jamestown, 16 Oct 2000, and on 18 Oct around the island, notably off Man and Horse, Great Stone Top (three birds over the 'Elephant' rock at base of cliffs) and Shore Island. In Dec 2001 common at cliffs on either side of Jamestown, and on 18 Dec around to Flagstaff, and occupying nest holes in high vertical cliffs below Half Tree Hollow. A single bird was seen off South West Point on 22 Dec. Numbers were greater in the early morning and late afternoon. The population appears to be healthy.

Cape Gannet ***Morus capensis*****.** Seen on 3 and 27 Dec 2001, off Cape Town, highest count 25 birds (3 Dec) NW of Dassen Island.

Immature Cape Gannet *(Morus capensis)*, Walvis Bay, Namibia, September 1995. *Photo:* Sam Alexander.

Masked Booby ***Sula dactylatra.*** *At sea:* Three were seen in a line 116 nm SE of St Helena flying NW, 22 Dec 2001. *At Ascension:* A few were seen off Georgetown, 24 Oct 2000. *At St Helena:* Up to 15 were seen off the north coast and Jamestown, 16 Oct 2000 and 8 Dec 2001. On Shore Island, 18 Oct 2000 (1410 hrs) up to 20 adults were seen at occupied sites, and on 18 Dec 2001 (1015 hrs) 25 adults, with three juveniles off shore. On George Island, 18 Oct 2000 (1445 hrs), only one was seen, and on 18 Dec 2001 (1110 hrs) seven adults including a pair on the summit. On Speery Island, 18 Oct 2000 (1230 hrs), two new colonies, 25+ birds, were seen, with heavy guano deposits. On 22 Dec 2001 (1130 hrs) three more distinct colonies/ roost sites were noted. All five sites are just below the summit on the seaward-facing side. Speery Island is a breeding range extension at St Helena, since at least 1994 (pers. obs., N.P. Ashmole and M.N. McCulloch, pers. comm.).

Brown Booby ***Sula leucogaster.*** *At sea:* Five birds were seen 31 nm SE of Ascension Island, flying NW, 24 Oct 2000. *At Ascension:* A few were seen off Georgetown, 24 Oct 2000. *At St Helena:* A few were seen off the north coast and Jamestown, 16 Oct 2000, when three birds also roosted on moored boats, and 8 Dec 2001. Seen around the island 18 Oct 2000, and 18 and 22 Dec 2001, including Shore Island (18 Dec, 1025-1040 hrs) where ten birds were seen on cliff ledges at lower levels. The population is apparently increasing, but Shore Island evidently remains the sole nesting site.

Cape Cormorant ***Phalacrocorax capensis.*** In 2000 flocks up to five birds passed astern, Table Bay and south of Dassen Island, off Cape Town, 11 Oct. In 2001 common on 3 and 27 Dec, off Cape Town, highest count 70 birds (3 Dec) NW of Dassen Island.

Bank Cormorant ***Phalacrocorax neglectus***. Two were seen south of Dassen Island, off Cape Town, 11 Oct 2000.

Masked Booby *(Sula dactylatra)*, George Island, St Helena, February 1992. *Photo:* BW Rowlands.

Ascension Frigatebird ***Fregata aquila.*** A few were seen off Georgetown, Ascension Island, 24 Oct 2000.

Cattle Egret ***Bubulcus ibis.*** A flock of 41 passed over the ship, off Cape Town, on way to Robbin Island from Blouberg, 11 Oct 2000.

Sacred Ibis ***Threskiornis aethiopicus.*** A flock of five passed over the ship, off Cape Town, on way to Dassen Island from Yzerfontein, 11 Oct 2000. A bird was seen east of Robben Island, 3 Dec 2001.

Southern Skua ***Catharacta antarctica.*** One was seen harrying a Sandwich Tern south of Dassen Island, off Cape Town, 11 Oct 2000. One, over a small fish shoal (where marlin jumped), was seen at 30.9S 14.8E, 26 Dec 2001.

Pomarine Skua ***Stercorarius pomarinus.*** Seen at sea on 13 and 14 Oct 2000, between 27.1S 7.2E and 23S 3.6E, highest count two birds. One was photographed in flight, off Ladder Hill, St Helena, 18 Dec 2001.

Arctic Skua ***Stercorarius parasiticus.*** One was seen at 25.4S 6.8E, 13 Oct 2000, and one off Cape Town, south of Dassen Island, 27 Dec 2001.

Kelp Gull ***Larus dominicanus.*** In 2000 seen in counts of up to eight, off Cape Town, 11 Oct. In 2001 common off Cape Town, 3 and 27 Dec, highest count ten birds (27 Dec). On 3 Dec up to six accompanied the ship NW of Dassen Island for 3 hours after sunset.

1st Winter Kelp Gull *(Larus dominicanus)*, Stanley, Falkland Islands, November 1996. *Photo:* Sam Alexander.

Hartlaub's Gull ***Larus hartlaubii.*** Singles were counted off Cape Town, 11 Oct 2000 and 3 Dec 2001.

'Commic' Tern ***Sterna hirundo/paradisaea.*** Single Common or Arctic Terns, winter plumage, were seen off Cape Town, 11 Oct 2000, and at 23.1S 3.7E on 14 Oct. Up to 20 birds, also of winter plumage were seen from the ship foraging in Cape Town Docks, 2 and 3 Dec 2001.

Arctic Tern ***Sterna paradisaea.*** One seen over the ship, 17.9S 3.2W, 15 Oct 2000.

Sandwich Tern ***Sterna sandvicensis.*** Singles were seen on 11 and 12 Oct 2000, from off Cape Town to 30.3S 13.8E.

Sooty Tern *Sterna fuscata. At Ascension:* A few were seen off Georgetown, 24 Oct 2000. Breeding was in progress at the 'fairs' near Wideawake Airfield, but a visit to the site was not possible as the ship had curtailed its call (anchorage 1046-1511 hrs). *At St Helena:* Ten birds were seen over Speery Island, also George and Shore Islands, 18 Oct 2000, and only a single bird on George Island (NW end), 18 Dec 2001. Since the 1950s the population at St Helena has been decreasing (Ashmole & Ashmole 2000: 284), and this evidently continues.

Swift Tern ***Sterna bergii.*** Birds were seen in Cape Town Docks, Table Bay and off Yzerfontein, 3 and 27 Dec 2001, highest count 14 birds (3 Dec) NW of Dassen Island.

Black Noddy ***Anous minutus.*** In Rowlands (1992, 1995) this species is given as the Lesser Noddy *Anous tenuirostris. At sea:* Eight birds were seen 27 nm NW of St Helena, 22 Oct 2000, and a single bird 31 nm NW of Ascension, 24 Oct. *At Ascension:* Up to 20 were seen off Georgetown, 24 Oct 2000.
At St Helena: Flocks of up to 15 birds were seen off Jamestown, 16 and 22 Oct 2000 and 8 and 22 Dec 2001. Also seen all around the island, 18 Oct 2000 and 18 Dec 2001, with roosts on Lighter Rock and Ladies' Chair, and breeding colonies in Oct 2000 (nest-building, eggs) and Dec 2001 (chicks) at Egg, Peaked, Speery, George and Shore Islands, also Upper Black Rock and Salt Rock. On mainland cliffs, new sites were recorded at Gill Point (50+ nests in 2000, 100+ in 2001) and 'The Elephant' (50+ nests) below Great Stone Top, 18 Oct 2000, and Castle Rock Point, 22 Dec 2001. All colonies were on steep to vertical surfaces. In Oct 2000 and Dec 2001 the largest colonies were on Egg Island, on both the north and south sides, 2000+ pairs in total. The population at St Helena is evidently increasing.

Common Noddy ***Anous stolidus.*** *At Ascension:* A few were seen off Georgetown, 24 Oct 2000. *At St Helena:* Up to ten birds were seen in James Bay, 8 Dec 2001, roosting on moored boats. Seen around the island, 18 Oct 2000 and 18 Dec 2001, occupying sites on Lighter Rock (2000) and breeding (2001) on Egg, Peaked, George and Shore Islands. On Egg Island, 18 Oct 2000 (1010-1110 hrs) a single fresh egg was found. On 18 Dec 2001 250+ nests with fresh eggs were found by R. Hindle (pers. comm.) on slopes leading up to the Cockburn Battery. On Peaked Island, 18 Dec (1300-1330 hrs), 50+ nests with fresh eggs were found, up to the summit. The population appears to be healthy.

Fairy Tern *(Gygis alba)*, Jamestown, St Helena, October 2000.
Photo: BW Rowlands.

Fairy Tern *Gygis alba*. *At sea:* Singles were seen up to 13 nm NW of St Helena, 22 Oct 2000, and sightings, highest six birds, up to 330 nm SE of St Helena, 22 and 23 Dec 2001. *At St Helena:* In Oct 2000 and Dec 2001 birds were commonly seen around the coast and inland, including the cliffs above Jamestown wharf. Seen courting and incubating on St James' Church, 17 Oct 2000. Some 25 pairs were seen on Thompson's Valley Island, 18 Oct, and two newly-hatched chicks in a mango tree (with eggshells below), Napoleon Street, Jamestown, 21 Oct. Eggshells following hatching were also found below steep cliffs at West Rocks, Ladder Hill, 17 Oct. The population remains healthy.

Discussion

Although the run between St Helena and Ascension Island, 22 to 24 Oct 2000, was at a different time of year compared with previous occasions (Rowlands 1992, 1995), seabirds breeding at the two islands again indicated a preference to remain close to them. On this occasion, this was up to 27 nm from St Helena and 31 nm from Ascension. At sea, in between, there was a lengthy gap in sightings, 634 nm, between 15.6S (22 Oct) and 8.4S (24 Oct), despite frequent occurrences of flying-fish in large schools (sea 22.8-25.2C), a principal prey of boobies and other seabirds. On all previous voyages (Rowlands 1992) only twice did sightings at sea between the two islands exceed two birds.

In marked contrast, between Cape Town and St Helena, where no flying-fish were seen, seabirds were sighted every day and in nearly all count periods, whereas on all previous voyages (in 1988-92 - Rowlands 1992), which were not in October, there was a distinct gap in sightings, including the Walvis Ridge (22-25S).

In December 2001, this gap, northbound, between 26.1S (5 Dec) and 19.4S (7 Dec), was 630 nm, and southbound, between 19.3S (23 Dec) and 22S (24 Dec), it was 355 nm. On the

Adelie Penguin *(Pygoscelis adeliae)*. Antarctica 2002.
Photo: Captain I Moncrieff RN.

Black-browed Albatross *(Diomedea melanophris)*, South Georgia 2002.
Photo: Brigadier David Nicholls.

Southern (Antarctic) Skua *(Catharacta antarctica)*, South Georgia 2002.
Photo: Brigadier David Nicholls.

Juvenile Wandering Albatross *(Diomedea exulans)*, South Georgia 2002.
Photo: Brigadier David Nicholls.

Eastern Pied Wheater (*Oeanthe picata*). HMS Edinburgh. Gulf. January 2003.
Photo: CWEM(R) S Copsey.

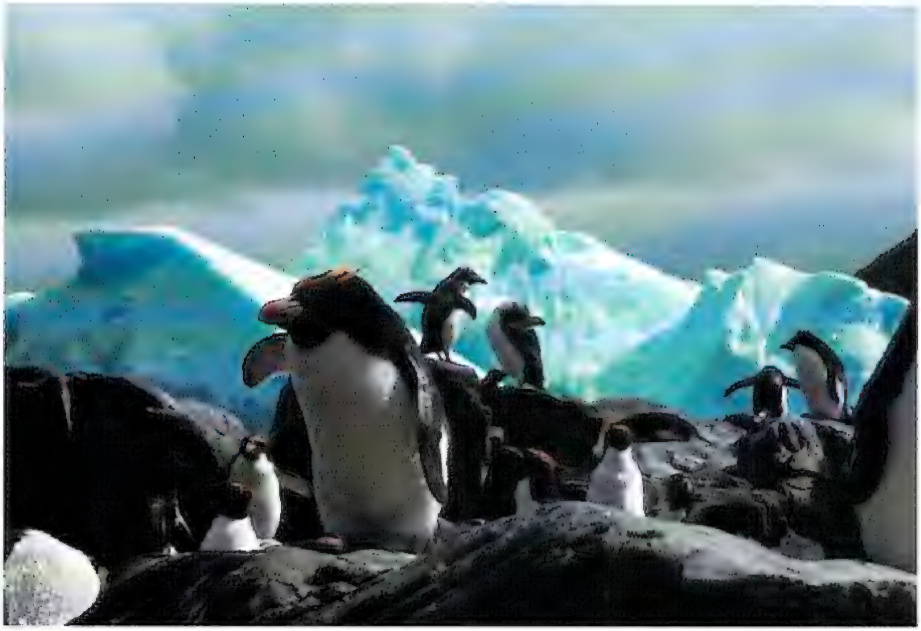
Blue-cheeked Bee-eater (*Merops superciliosus*). HMS Edinburgh. Gulf. January 2003.
Photo: CWEM(R) S Copsey.

Pacific Gull (*Larus pacificus*), 16 Nov 1980, Bass Strait, Australia. *Photo:* Neil Cheshire.

Eastern White Pelican (*Pelecanus onocrotalus*), 15 Mar 2000, Swakopmund, Namibia. *Photo:* Neil Cheshire.

Crested Lark *(Galemda cristata).* HMS Edinburgh, Gulf, January 2003.
Photo: CWEM(R) S Copsey.

Water Pipit *(Anthus rubescens).* HMS Edinburgh, Gulf, January 2003.
Photo: CWEM(R) S Copsey.



Rockhopper Penguin *(Eudyptes chrysocome)*, South Georgia 2002.
Photo: Brigadier David Nicholls.

Southern Giant Petrel *(Macronectes giganteus)*, South Georgia 2002.
Photo: Brigadier David Nicholls.

northbound leg the first flying-fish were seen at 30.9S (sea 18.9C), and southbound the last at 24.5S (sea 21.5C). For previous southernmost records of flying-fish south of St Helena (in 1988-92) see Rowlands *et al.* (1998: 46).

South of St Helena in October 2000 all sightings at sea within and north of the Walvis Ridge were either known temperate/sub-Antarctic breeding species or passage migrants. In December 2001, northbound, the only temperate species seen north of the Walvis Ridge was a single White-bellied Storm-petrel. Southbound on that same voyage the first temperate/sub-Antarctic species sightings were of two single Great-winged Petrels and a Wilson's Storm-petrel, all just north of Walvis Ridge waters. Other than six White Terns seen together 115 nm south of St Helena (22 Dec), in both 2000 and 2001 no sightings between the Walvis Ridge and St Helena away from land exceeded three birds at a time. The southernmost sighting of a known tropical breeding species was a Red-billed Tropicbird at 19.4S on 7 Dec 2001, 385 nm SE of St Helena.

At St Helena two offshore stacks were visited, ie Egg Island on 18 Oct 2000 and Peaked Island on 18 Dec 2001. In addition, R. Hindle visited Egg Island on 18 Dec 2001. It was evident that in October Madeiran Storm-petrels occupied nest holes and were courting (calling from underground, but no petrel smell), while the distinctive petrel smell in December suggests occupancy for a longer period. However, due to the nature of the terrain and sites no eggs nor young were seen.

The lower numbers of Masked Boobies seen at Shore and George Islands compared with earlier reports (Rowlands 1995, Rowlands *et al.* 1998: 123) are probably due to birds being away foraging at sea, while birds have also spread to previously unpublished sites on Speery Island. The population on Speery Island appears to be increasing.

The continuing decrease in the numbers of Sooty Terns at St Helena is a cause for concern, and regular monitoring is required to determine the cause.

Acknowledgements

I acknowledge the assistance of John Cooper for providing 10-minute cards, photocopying, and advising on methodology. Neil McCulloch assisted with observations northbound between Cape Town and St Helena in both October 2000 and December 2001, while in December 2001, northbound and southbound, Bob Hindle also assisted. Again, I thank Captain David Roberts and the duty officers of the RMS *St Helena* who provided access to instruments on the bridge and assistance in recording data. On both voyages, Captain Roberts initially followed the Cape coast inshore for the benefit of passengers, providing more opportunities to note local seabirds off shore. The December 2001 cruise to St Helena was a free passage won as first prize in a raffle earlier that year, and I thank Andrew Weir Shipping Ltd, the newly-appointed Managing Agents for RMS *St Helena*, for their honouring of this prize, awarded by the former agents, Curnow Shipping Ltd. Also, I thank Curnow Shipping for making the October 2000 voyage possible by having me aboard as a guest lecturer on a reduced fare. I also express appreciation to the many fellow passengers, officers, and crew, who drew my attention to birds.

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Sea Swallow 52 (2003)

BIRDS ALONG THE BOSPHORUS

By Stephen E Chapman

To the navigator this must be the ultimate challenge: constant traffic, strong currents and no where to go if there is a problem. This is tricky navigation along the 17 mile stretch of seaway that separates Europe from Asia. With an average width of just eight cables, and just two cables at the narrowest part, even with the now compulsory assistance of a pilot there is no time for watching anything other than the safety of navigation. In addition there are very strong currents and counter currents within the Strait, and its rate - depending upon the rate of precipitation - reaches up to eight knots.

But take a passenger ferry boat and sail from the Eminönü at the Sea of Marmara end north to Anadolu Kavagi or Sanyer near the point that the Strait merges into the Black Sea, and an experienced master looks after the navigation criss-crossing the channel to take advantage of the currents, to avoid the constant traffic and to stop off for passengers along the way, and you have all the opportunities you need for bird watching. Where else in Istanbul might you go on a sunny Sunday?

The ferry provides the unique opportunity for some seabirding. On 8 April 2001 the following birds were noted: Herring Gulls, Black-backed Gulls, Black-headed Gulls, sea terns, Cormorants and flocks of Levantine Shearwaters *Puffinus (yelkouan?) yelkouan* appearing brown-backed in the midday spring sunlight. The shearwater in flocks of 20-100 birds raced purposefully passed the ferry, first on one side and then on the other. Most overtook the boat and going north but a few passed against the main flow. The best chance to see these at close range is as the boat passes through the narrowest part between the two high road bridges that span the Straits.

For a unique experience get a shearwater's eye view of the Straits. Leave the boat deck and go down to the foc's'l or lower still to the main deck less than a metre above the sea. Here you will get a shearwater's eye view of shearwaters as they race by.

Several thousand of these small shearwaters must have passed through the straits during the course of the day. Movement of these shearwaters into the Black Sea is well known (Bourne, *et al* 1988). The movements witnessed here were presumably to or from feeding grounds. However, recorded feeding grounds in this area are at the southern end of the Bosphorus so they clearly were headed for another site. More observations may shed further light on the movements of this species.

The boat leaves from Eminönü pier 3, the one nearest to the Galata Bridge. The return cost is two million Turkish lira, not as expensive as the number suggests; a little less than two dollars for the ticket. Drinks and toasted sandwiches are offered on board and will cost more than the boat tariff.

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LANDBIRD MIGRATION REPORTS
HMS EDINBURGH -AUTUMN 2002 AND SPRING 2003
Autumn 2002 - Eastern Mediterranean

Once again I have had the pleasure of serving on a ship in the right place at the right time. As opposed to my last article in *Sea Swallow*, on this subject from *HMS York*, these current records are taken from my time on *HMS Edinburgh.*

The Autumn of 2002 was spent cruising the Eastern Mediterranean. Most of our time was devoted to Operation Enduring Freedom, within a task group made up of STANAVFORMED ships. Our role in the operation was to patrol two boxes in the area. The first was situated between Cyprus and Syria while the second involved operating to the North of Port Said monitoring traffic to and from the Suez Canal.

The first significant bird of the trip was on passage just south of Sicily. I was called to the upper deck a few minutes after dusk had fallen, to see 'a big hawk like bird flying around'. I got there to find a juvenile Osprey *(Pandion haliaetus)* perched on top of the foremast. The individual concerned did not appear too settled and frequently left the perch flew around for a few minutes before re-alighting at the same spot. Unfortunately, it was too dark for photography, but we continued to watch the Osprey for a further half an hour or so, until it went to roost on the mast. One of the Chief Stokers onboard came back up at first light to find the bird still on it's temporary perch. He informed me that it left a few minutes after sunrise.

Two days later we had the pleasure of a Turtle Dove *(Streptopelia turtur)* on the f'csle. At the same time that a Barn Swallow *(Hirundo rustica)* was hawking insects around the ships side.

Spotted Flycatcher *(Muscicapa striata)*, HMS Edinburgh, Northern Gulf, January 2003. *Photo:* CWEM(R) S Copsey.

Once on station we had one of the more extraordinary sightings of the trip. Once again, on this occasion thanks to the flight, I was called to the upper deck. In the distance a good few miles away, but visible with the naked eye, were five large birds spiralling. I gained more clarity through binoculars but at the range I was viewing I could not be certain of identification. They

were definitely of the Buteo, species, the most prominent feature noted was a definite white under wing marking and this coupled with the buzzard species would lead me to make an educated guess at Steppe Buzzard *(Buteo vulpinus)*. They passed at quite a height and heading off to the South, after another spiral to gain height. Within an hour another four more Buzzards flying together passed in the same direction. These nine birds must have been flying over water as we were in international waters, but their exact relationship to the ground remains a mystery.

From the 22nd onwards passerines started to pass through. Several Olivaceous Warblers *(Hippolais pallida)* were noted around the ship. They were soon joined by one of the many Spotted Flycatchers *(Musciapa striata)* that graced the ship over the next few weeks. A well plumaged male Whinchat *(Saxicola rubetra)* spent the morning of the 23rd on the f'esle guard-rails along with a possible Upcher's Warbler *(Hippolais languida)* but I cannot say I was 100 per cent on the identification.

A bird without any identification problems flew by the ship on the 29th, an adult Grey Heron *(Ardea cinerea)* passed within 100 yards of the bow at an approximate height of 100 feet heading NE. Once it passed the ship it dropped right down to the water surface and remained at a height of no more than a few feet as it disappeared from view.

As normal, Yellow Wagtails put it numerous appearances over the period. On the 30th what looked like a family group comprising one adult and three juveniles spent an hour or so feeding on the flight deck. The adult bird was showing a charcoal dark head somewhere in between the two races of *Feldegg* and *Cinereocapilla*. The first of up to five Nightjars *(Caprimulgus europaeus)* also showed well later the same day. The bird was seen and photographed roosting the day out on the hangar roof, the favoured place of the dozen or so birds of this species I have seen at sea over the last few years.

A Redstart *(Phoenicurus phoenicurus)* made a brief stop on the 2nd of October and later the same day I was called to the bridge to find an Orphean Warbler *(Sylvia hortensis)*. This individual had flown inside the bridge minutes earlier and then hit one of the windows as it attempted to fly back out. I picked the 'groggy' Warbler up and was going to get some details of what I thought was a dying bird. However after a few minutes in the hand, and before I could get a camera accessed, it came back to life and started chirping away whilst putting up a brief struggle. Not wanting to stress the bird any further I held on as we were still inside but immediately went out to the bridge wing. Once there I opened my palm and the bird flew straight to the guard-rail where it perched for a few seconds as if to regain it's composure before flying off.

Later the same day I caught a brief glimpse of a green bird at some distance. I managed to get a few more views of what I believe was my first Icterine Warbler *(Hippolais icterina)*. I still remember the vivid green plumage. Once again I was not fully sure with this one but Icterine was my best educated guess.

A Pied Wagtail *(Motacilla alba)* paid a visit the next day, but it was the 4th that I will remember. I was called to the bridge during lunch by the OOW, who informed me that radar was tracking numerous flocks of birds. Sure enough when I viewed the screen, there were multitudes of contacts heading South. Most passed out of view, but the odd flock came within a few miles and with binoculars I could clearly see though not identify the birds involved. Each flock I saw must have had around 500 to 1000 individuals in it. During one hour around sixty of these contacts passed by only seen by radar. The numbers of individuals involved must have run into the tens of thousands. I can say it was an amazing spectacle to witness even though not one bird was identified. The memory of that hour will stay with me forever. We worked out that the birds were flying at an average of 40 knots and we plotted the course they would

fly. Our reckoning was that it would take the birds between six and seven hours on their current flight path after leaving Europe to cross the Mediterranean and reach the African mainland.

Towards mid October the most common bird around the ship was the humble Robin (Erithacus *rubecula*). Some days we had over twenty birds in and around the various parts of the ship. Quite often Chaffinches (*Fringilla coelebs*) were amongst them. Blackcaps (*Sylvia atricapilla*) also started cropping up around the flight deck at regular intervals.

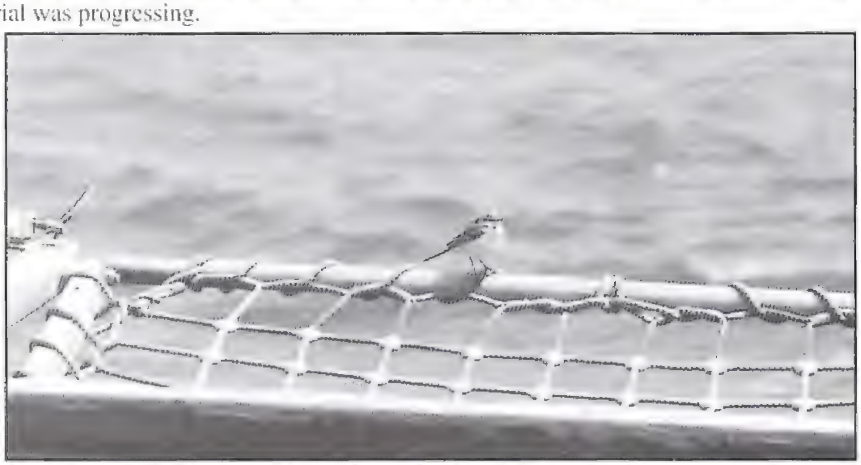
That concludes the autumn chapter of events. It has to be said at the time, I thought that trip to the Med was a swan song for my contributions to *Sea Swallow*. Little did I know there was to be a spot of business to attend to in the Gulf within eight weeks.

Spring 2003 - Gulf

In the autumn of 2002, *HMS Edinburgh* was placed in the amphibious task group for potential involvement in Operation TELIC. In January 2002, along with other units of the task group we duly sailed for the Gulf. As you can imagine, the first few weeks were taken up with a high degree of training, training and more training, which left little time for the past time of birdwatching. Nevertheless, after we had arrived on station I managed to keep an eye or an ear open to any avian occurrences on the upper deck.

The first species of note was a real cracker. Once again I was called to the upper deck to see a 'green bird that was perched by the signal deck'. I headed up expecting to see a run of the mill passerine. Imagine my surprise and delight to see a resplendent Blue Cheeked Bee-eater (*Merops superciliosus*) perched on the guard-rail. On this trip I told myself to make more of an effort in the photography department. This noted, I snapped away numerous pictures of the bird, as it stayed with us all morning, and at one point it even gave us some vocals from atop of one of the phalanx lockers.

A couple of days later during a 4.5 shoot, I got called to the bridge. I thought at first I had a defective radio, so necessarily hurried up. However, on arrival one of the gunnery team pointed to a bird on the f'csle. I glanced down on a Hoopoe (*Upupa epops*) the first of many over the next month. There I was birdwatching, attempting to use the Yeoman's binoculars, feigning interest in the nearest radio set, as the Skipper sat a few feet away getting a sitrep on how the serial was progressing.



Yellow Wagtail (*Motacilla flava beema*), HMS Edinburgh, Northern Gulf, January 2003. *Photo:* CWEM(R) S Copsey

Events during the middle of March curtailed my watching for a couple of weeks, but towards the month's end as external activities quietened, the northbound migration got into full swing. After a brief sandstorm passed through the area birds literally started to flood the ship. On the 26th of March another Hoopoe put in an appearance along with a White Wagtail *(Motacilla alba)*. These two were joined by a Crested Lark *(Galerida cristata)* that spent a couple of days onboard. A Tawny Pipit *(Anthus campestris)* also spent a few days with us and showed a partiality to Pusser's Jammy Dodgers. The first of numerous Yellow Wagtails joined us on the 27th and fed busily on flight deck insects. The majority of these birds on this trip I believe, belonged to the *Beema* race of the Blue Headed Yellow Wagtail. The various races and sub-species can get a little confusing to say the least. It has to be said the majority of the Wagtails are very tame and during feeding would pass within feet of individuals if they remained still. Most would feed for long periods around the ship but showed a particular fondness for the flight deck, displaying great agility, as they caught a lot of insects in mid air. Later that morning a Red Throated Pipit *(Anthus cervinus)* joined the wagtails on the flight deck and that too fed well.

A Red Breasted Flycatcher *(Ficedula parva)* which I would estimate to be a second summer bird was on the flight deck on the 29th feeding in and around the helicopter. Two Pied Wheatears *(Oenanthe pleschanka)* could be seen the day after. Around twenty Phylloscopus Warblers surrounded these in turn. The majority appeared to be Willow but as usual, identification within this species is never straightforward. The Willows *(P trochilus)* along with the Chiffchaffs *(P collybita)* fed constantly in and around the hangar and flight deck. I spoke to the flight about this and was told that the hangar topped up with insects during night flying serials. They were quite glad to see these warblers helping out the cause. Three of these birds spent a whole morning feeding among the hangar fittings. Also seen on the 30th was a well turned out male Redstart *(P phoenicurus)* always a pleasure to come across. Another Red Breasted Flycatcher spent part of the morning perched on the helicopter rotors. One of the more curious sightings of the trip also spent the day in and around the ship. A one legged White Wagtail *(Motacilla alba)* literally hopped his way around most of the upper deck feeding as he went. Occasionally an enforced break would be taken lying down. Many of the ship's company reported 'Hoppy' to me over the next 24 hours. One even suggesting we catch him and keep him as a ships pet due to his unfortunate circumstances! The last bird of the day was a Kestrel *(Falco tinnunculus)* which flew in at dusk and settled on the mainmast after a few laps of the superstructure.

The following day was much the same, Hoopoe, Willow Warblers, Chiffchaffs and Pied Wheatears all putting in more appearances. Glad to say also that Hoppy at least survived any intentions the Kestrel may have had, as once again he hopped about his business. Yet again Yellow Wagtails along with the Phylloscopus species were most numerous. Many times over the week ahead I was asked if I had seen the 'bright yellow birds catching insects around the upper deck'.

The 2 April threw up a couple of queries. Off the Starboard bow I saw a very pale medium sized bird flying across the ship's path. Initially Barn Owl sprung to mind but as it neared I could see it was a small member of the Heron family. Unfortunately my binoculars were not to hand as I had my camera, but through the lens I could see a pure white winged bird, with brownish or possibly orange markings on its back and head. My first guess would be with Squacco Heron *(Ardeola ralloides)*, but then again I would not be able to discount Cattle Egret *(Bubulcus ibis)*. The second challenge of the day was a small Serin like finch seen tucked under the after breakwater. I initially saw the bird from the bridge and popped down to the f'csle to

attempt a photograph. Unfortunately due to its position the light was poor. A picture was taken regardless, so hopefully this might lead to a positive identification. The small finch was very green, with a small bill and I remember a dark eye. It could have been a Syrian Serin *(Serinus syriacus)*, or more likely perhaps a European Serin *(S serinus)*. Maybe the picture will close the argument, but I am not over confident.

The following day provided less of a challenge. Yet again dozens of Phylloscopus Warblers passed by, some alighting others flying on. The same could be said for yet more Yellow Wagtails. Again the Blue headed race being the most commonly seen. Another Hoopoe dropped in on the f'csle. The bird concerned landed on a guard-rail raised the crest as is the norm, waited a few seconds then flew off. This was probably the most common sighting reported to me by other members of the ship. All gave the near perfect description of a Hoopoe. If only all identification was that easy. I then had a real bonus. As I was watching around the gun a Bluethroat *(Luscina magna)* alighted on the guardrail. I have seen several of these in autumn, but only ever females and immature birds so not the best plumage wise. This bird however, was a male in full breeding dress, displaying the whole blue throat of the *magna* race. I was hopeful of a stunning photograph for the *Sea Swallow* archives but just to keep me from a perfect memory the bird flew of as I focused, not to be seen again. Soon after a Blackcap *(Sylvia atricapilla)* allowed very close views as it fed on the flight deck safety nets. I have lost count of the number of warblers I have seen working their way round these nets. To be sure of a good photograph just sit alongside the nets and most birds pass within a few feet. The Blackcap did not disappoint.

The evening of the 4th provided a really dynamic sighting. I was called from the mess (much to the chagrin of my fellow card players) for a 'brown starling size bird eating dragonflies in the hangar'. I duly arrived to find a Great Reed Warbler *(Acrocephalus arundinaceus)* making short work of a large dragonfly. Some resistance was offered but to no avail. As we watched another large dragonfly was taken in mid-air. Yet again the insect showed a modicum of defiance but the end result was the same. We then watched as the warbler worked its way through the hangar's larger flies. Showing a great deal of speed and agility as it snatched up its prey. The bird roosted the night away in the hangar in the vicinity of a tail-less Tree Pipit *(Anthus trivialis)*. Both birds departed at first light when the main door was opened.

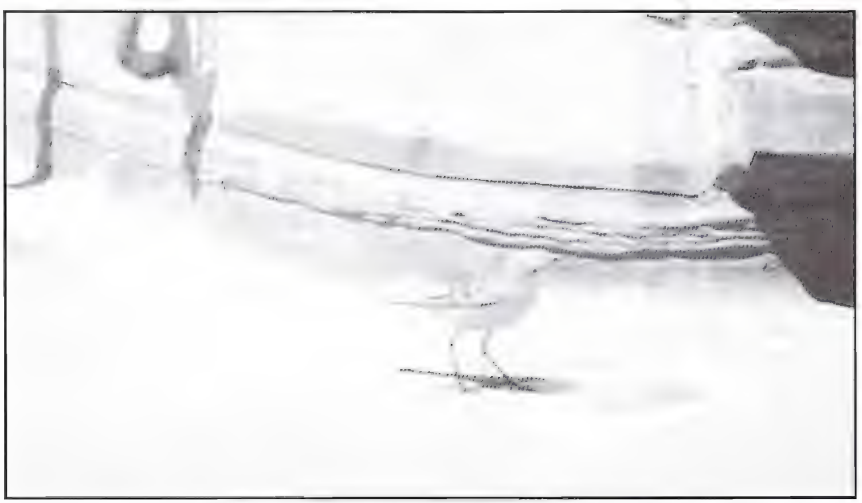
As April progressed and the weather improved, and bird sightings diminished as expected. The second week was void of sightings except for the 14th. I had just sat on a flight deck bollard pondering the dearth of birds over the previous week, when a Lesser Whitethroat *(Sylvia curruca)* fluttered down from the hangar roof and landed adjacent to me on the flight deck nets. Overnight it had been raining and the warbler had either been caught in it, or more likely had just finished bathing on the boat deck area. It proceeded to spend the next 5 to 10 minutes preening, paying as you would expect particular attention to its wings. Once happy with its plumage, off it flew.

The Lesser Whitethroat started the ball rolling again, the following day a Chiffchaff and a Yellow Wagtail of the *Beema* race were feeding on the flight deck. An hour or so later a very dark morph Palm Dove *(Streptopelia senegalensis)* was strutting around the flight deck and hangar, picking at any morsel it could find. I have seen many of these birds but never one showing this plumage.

A European Bee-Eater spent five minutes perched on the 4.5 gun on the morning of the 16th; I left for my camera and returned within a minute to see the same bird disappearing out to sea. More Wagtails and Phylloscopus Warblers along with the odd Redstart passed through on the 17th but that was only the start of it. Two Red Throated Pipits showed well on the f'csle. Then

what was to become a confusing Wheatear came into view. I was sat on the flightdeck when a jet black and white Wheatear landed briefly a few yards away. At first I thought Pied, but as it flew it showed the tail markings of a Hooded Wheatear *(Oenanthe monacha)*. To confuse matters further later in the morning I saw yet another Wheatear. A generally blackish brown to it and certainly not the same jet black as an hour before. This bird I would have taken for Pied, but once again the bird showed the same tail markings as the previous individual. I have taken several pictures of the birds with the hope of a more conclusive identification in due course.

An Isabelline Shrike *(Lanius isabellinus)*, the first shrike of the trip, was seen on the flight deck nets during the lunch hour. It was making short work of several large dragonflies, which it was catching around the stern of the ship. It was quite tame and allowed close approach as it worked its way through the menu. The first clear views of a male Citrine Wagtail *(Motacilla citreola)* were also obtained a few minutes later. The resplendent male was in company with a first winter bird, both feeding busily on the numerous insects that covered the ship.



Citrine Wagtail *(Motacilla citreola)*, Northern Gulf, February 2003.
Photo: CWEM(R) S Copsey

Another couples of firsts were encountered on the morning of the 18th . A dawn start on the upper deck was rewarded by an Ortolan Bunting *(Emberzia hortulana)*. Which I would say was a female or a first winter male, the individual concerned was already hard at work feeding on the small white moths that litter the superstructure first thing in the morning. I was surprised to come across a juvenile Moorhen *(Gallinula chloropus)* as I first walked onto the f'csle. I guess the young bird was also a little startled as it ran away towards the bow and subsequently took to flight. The pattern of the previous few days was again followed. Numerous Yellow Wagtails of various races, Redstarts, Swallows and Warblers all passed by the ship during the morning.

On the 25th an Olivaceous Warbler *(Hippolais pallida)* showed very well in the hangar, the constant flicking of the tail, always an aid to identification. At the same time another Isabelline Shrike spent five to ten minutes perched on the ship's guardrails. A new bird for the trip was present in the hangar on the last day of April. A Rufous Bush Robin *(Cercotrichas galactotes)*

spent over an hour up among the fixtures and fittings. I did not see it take any insects but I could see it snapping its head around as the dragonflies flew past. The first Nightjar *(Caprimulgus europaeus)* for the deployment was seen later that morning. As with many of this species that I have seen onboard, it spent a good hour flying up and down the ships side usually just a few metres of the surface. Again and again it followed this routine. Although I couldn't see it, I would hazard a guess that the bird was feeding as it went. As a few of us watched the Nightjar, a European Bee-eater flew towards the ship from the stem. I thought at first it was going to alight but it appeared to take a cursory glance at the flight deck and then flew on.

The 2nd May was a sizzling day in more ways than one. I walked the waists just after eight in the morning, the temperature already above 30C. I looked up to the hangar roof which is probably the most popular roost on the ship, and saw a Grey Shrike. I grabbed my camera and approached closer for a better look. I was pleased to see a Lesser Grey Shrike *(Lanius minor)* perched on one of the lifting davits. The standard grey/black plumage being finished off with a deep salmon pink breast and belly. The bird was present for ten minutes before being replaced at the exact same perch by a female Woodchat Shrike *(Lanius senator)* both were very accommodating for my Olympus. A Spotted Flycatcher *(Muscicapa striata)* was perched a few metres away and ended up on the flight deck catching insects from around the helicopter. A Lesser Whitethroat and a Garden Warbler *(Sylvia borin)* also put in appearances at the same time.

The highlight of seeing the two shrikes was just about the last chapter for this article. The ship left the Arabian Gulf the following day and made it's way home for a well deserved break. An Egyptian Nightjar *(Caprimulgus aegyptius)* showed well just off the coast of Oman near Salahah. The final bird of the trip was a Turtle Dove *(Streptopelia turtur)*, which headed North past the ship in the Gulf of Suez. Looking back, I have to say that during the 120 continuous days the ship spent at sea, from January to mid-day, were quite an endurance, but they were certainly brightened up for many others and myself by the avian delights that chose *HMS Edinburgh* as a suitable stopover.

CWEM(R) S Copsey
HMS Edinburgh
BFPO 277

Lesser Grey Shrike *(Lanius minor)*, Northern Gulf, February 2003.
Photo: CWEM(R) S Copsey.

Sea Swallow 52 (2003)

SEABIRD OBSERVATIONS ON THREE VOYAGES BETWEEN ASCENSION ISLAND AND CARDIFF, U.K. - WITH A SPECIAL REFERENCE TO THE GREAT SHEARWATER *PUFFINUS GRAVIS*

by Beau W. Rowlands

Introduction

Given here are details of seabirds observed from the RMS *St Helena* on three northbound voyages between Ascension Island (7.9S 14.4W), central Atlantic Ocean, and Cardiff (51.5N 3.2W).

The voyages were in May-June 1991, February 1992 and October-November 2000. All three included Santa Cruz de Tenerife (28.5N 16.2W), the regular route, while on the third voyage additional (cargo) calls were made at Vigo, Spain (42.2N 8.8W) and Falmouth (50.1N 5W). Crossing-points at the Equator were respectively 15.8W, 13.6W and 15.8W, and off Dakar, Senegal (14.8N 17.5W) the respective passing distances from shore (Cape Vert) were 19 nm, 24 nm and 1 nm. No other shipping was seen south of 1N, after which shipping was regularly seen from West African waters (respectively 08.2N, 11.9N and 10.2N), through to the UK. Times given are GMT, and the ship's speed averaged 15 knots.

Counting followed the same method as in Rowlands (1992, 2003 in press). Observations for a full day at sea totalled not less than three hours, i.e. in early morning, around midday and later afternoon, as well as casual observations at other times.

Species Accounts

Altogether, 25 species were identified. Seven were transequatorial migrants (not including tropical species), ie Cory's Shearwater, Great Shearwater, Wilson's Storm-petrel, Leach's Storm-petrel, Grey Phalarope, Arctic Skua and Pomarine Skua. For these migrants both northernmost and southernmost records are given, while for tropical species the northernmost are given, southernmost in the case of northern temperate species, and for each voyage. Unidentified sightings, of shearwaters, storm-petrels, gannets and terns, are included. Records for the Northern Gannet and gulls are given separately for adults, sub-adults and juveniles. In some cases, eg Great Shearwater, both latitude and longitude positions are included.

Northern Fulmar ***Fulmarus glacialis***. Seen only from Bay of Biscay to south coast of England, Feb 1992 and Nov 2000, highest count three birds (18 Feb). All were light morphs. The southernmost were at 46.8N (17 Feb, 1700 hrs) and 45.8N (4 Nov, 0822 hrs).

Bulwer's Petrel ***Bulweria bulwerii***. Singles were seen in May and Jun 1991 and Oct 2000, northernmost at 31.7N (1 Jun, 0734 hrs) and 3.4S (25 Oct, 0801 hrs).

Cory's Shearwater ***Calonectris diomedea***. Seen on all three voyages, in 1991 between 8.1N (27 May, 0803 hrs) and 48.4N (4 Jun, 1700 hrs), in 1992 between 3.2S (8 Feb, 1715 hrs) and 28.7N (14 Feb,1226 hrs) and in 2000 between 11.4N (27 Oct, 1731 hrs) and 31.7N (31 Oct, 1223 hrs). Highest count ten birds (31 May 1991).

Shearwater Sp. ***Puffinus* Sp.** Unidentified shearwaters were seen in 1991 between 21.9N (29 May, 1230 hrs) and 48N (4 Jun, 1530 hrs) and in 2000 at 11.2N (27 Oct, 1640 hrs). Highest count 3 birds (29 May 1991).

Great Shearwater ***Puffinus gravis***. In May 1991 up to four birds were seen at a time in the first half of the Ascension-Tenerife leg, up to 10.7N 17.7W (27 May, 1800 hrs). All were moving north, overtaking the vessel. In Nov 2000 off Vigo birds were seen near the Cies Islands in flocks of up to 47 (2 Nov, 0800-0843 hrs), and singles near Onza Island (1600-1637 hrs) next day. On 4 Nov two singles were seen in the Bay of Biscay, at 45.8N 8W (0823 hrs) and 46.7N 7.4W (1207 hrs), moving south.

Storm-petrel Sp. Seen on all three voyages, in 1991 between 20.5N (29 May, 0700 hrs) and 32N (1 Jun, 1050 hrs), in 1992 between 17.9N (12 Feb, 0858 hrs) and 23.9N (13 Feb, 0856 hrs) and in 2000 between 5.5N (26 Oct, 1732 hrs) and 37.2N (1 Nov, 1219 hrs). Highest counts four birds (29 May 1991, 1 Nov 2000).

Wilson's Storm-petrel ***Oceanites oceanicus***. One was seen at 4.1N 16.5W, 26 Oct 2000 (1200 hrs).

Leach's Storm-petrel ***Oceanodroma leucorhoa*/Madeiran Storm-petrel** ***Oceanodroma castro***. Seen on 1992 voyage, between 5S (8 Feb, 0805 hrs) and 18.7N (12 Feb, 1209 hrs), highest count four birds (11 Feb).

Leach's Storm-petrel ***Oceanodroma leucorhoa***. Seen in Feb 1992 south of Tenerife, passing close to and under the bows, and flushed from water, between 18.6N (12 Feb, 1218 hrs) and 24.6N (13 Feb, 1221 hrs), highest count two birds. A single bird was found on deck, 26 Oct 2000 (0830 hrs), photographed, and released the same day (0845 hrs), at 3.3N 16.4W.

Leach's Storm-petrel *(Oceanodroma leucorhoa)*, RMS St Helena 3°15'N 10°20'W, October 2000. *Photo:* BW Rowlands.

Madeiran Storm-petrel *Oceanodroma castro*. Seen on all three voyages, with northernmost records at 40.5N (3 Jun 1991, 0600 hrs), 18.8N (12 Feb 1992, 1222 hrs) and 5.6N (26 Oct 2000, 1752 hrs). The highest count was 12 birds (27 May 1991). Only in Jun was this species seen north of Tenerife. A single bird came on deck at the Equator (15.8W), on 25 Oct 2000 (2100 hrs). It was photographed, and released next morning (0725 hrs) at 2.9N 16.3W.

White-faced Storm-petrel *Pelagodroma marina*. Seen south of Tenerife, Feb 1992, one at 5S 10.6W (8 Feb, 0750 hrs) and two at 17.9N 18.1W (12 Feb, 0838 hrs).

Gannet Sp. ***Morus bassana/capensis.*** One was seen at 20.5N 17.8W, 29 May 1991 (0700 hrs).

Northern Gannet ***Morus bassana.*** Seen on all three voyages, southernmost at 46N (adult, 4 Jun 1991, 0703 hrs), 50N (two adults, 18 Feb 1992, 0812 hrs) and 21.4N (four adults and three juveniles, highest count, 29 Oct 2000, 0740 hrs). All birds seen in 1991 and 1992 were adults. Only in 2000 were birds seen south of Tenerife, including the first sub-adult, at 21.6N, off Western Sahara, on 29 Oct (0836 hrs); the last sub-adult was seen at 46.8N on 4 Nov (1248 hrs) and the last juvenile at 38.3N on 1 Nov (1652 hrs). An adult found on deck, off Lundy Island (51.2N 4.7W), 5 Jun 1991, flew off unaided (0605 hrs).

Masked Booby *Sula dactylatra*. Seen in May 1991 and Oct 2000, all adults. Northernmost records were at 04.6S 15.1W (25 May, 0816 hrs). One bird preyed on flying-fish disturbed by the vessel. At 7.3S 14.6W (24 Oct, 1736 hrs), a skein of 11 birds, highest count, was seen 40 nm NW of Ascension Island, flying SE.

Brown Booby *Sula leucogaster*. On 29 May 1991 there were three sightings, singles, at 21.4N 17.6W (1045 hrs, off bows), 21.9N 17.5W (1230 hrs) and 22.6N 17.6W (1445 hrs, overtaking ship), all off Western Sahara.

Great Cormorant *Phalacrocorax carbo*. Ten were seen in Cardiff Docks, 5 Jun 1991 (1100 hrs), and a single bird in Bristol Channel (50.1N), 18 Feb 1992 (0823 hrs). Also, one was seen at 14.8N, off Cape Vert, Dakar (lighthouse flash visible, through haze - daylight), 28 Oct 2000 (0640 hrs).

European Shag *Phalacrocorax aristotelis*. Seen off Vigo (42.2N), 2 Nov 2000 (0850 hrs) and 3 Nov (1600 hrs, highest count two birds), and off Falmouth (50.1N), 5 Nov (0800 hrs).

Grey Phalarope *Phalaropus fulicarius*. Seen in Feb 1992 and Oct 2000, all south of Tenerife, in flight and landing on water. All were in winter plumage. Six sightings on 11 to 13 Feb were between 14.1N (1749 hrs) and 24.8N (1233 hrs), and three singles off Western Sahara on 29 Oct were between 22.5N (1158 hrs) and 23.5N (1556 hrs). The highest count was four birds (12 Feb 1992).

Great Skua *Catharacta skua*. Seen in Feb 1992 and Oct and Nov 2000, all singles. The southernmost were respectively on 15 Feb (from 34.8N, 1345 hrs) following vessel for about an hour, until trash was dropped, and 26 Oct (0823 hrs) at 3.2N.

Arctic Skua ***Stercorarius parasiticus***. Seen on all three voyages, in 1991 at 20.6N (29 May, 0720 hrs, with Pomarine Skua), in 1992 between 4.9N (8 Feb, 0825 hrs) and 23.7N (13 Feb, 0800 hrs) and in 2000 between 5.5N (26 Oct, 1711 hrs) and 22.4N (29 Oct, 1138 hrs). Highest count four birds (12 Feb 1992).

Pomarine Skua ***Stercorarius pomarinus***. Seen on all three voyages, in 1991 between 20.6N (29 May, 0720 hrs) and 48.3N (4 Jun, 1857 hrs), in 1992 (light phase birds) between 12.8N (11 Feb, 1227 hrs) and 23.8 N (13 Feb, 0823 hrs), and in 2000 between 11.4N (27 Oct, 1736 hrs) and 38.2N (1 Nov, 1629 hrs). Highest count six birds (28 Oct 2000).

Herring Gull ***Larus argentatus*/Yellow-legged Gull** ***Larus cachinnans***. Seen on all three voyages, and at the time were recorded as 'Herring Gulls'. The southernmost were off Santa Cruz de Tenerife (adults and juveniles, 30 May 1991, 1615 hrs, and adults, 14 Feb 1992, noon), and a single adult at 5.7N, 260 nm SW of Freetown, Sierra Leone (26 Oct 2000, 1830 hrs). No juveniles were seen in 1992, while in 2000 the southernmost juveniles seen were two at 30.7N, 31 Oct (0823 hrs). At Vigo, 2 and 3 Nov, birds seen within the inlet and harbour were more commonly adults, off shore more commonly juveniles. Off England, 5 Nov, birds were seen only between Falmouth and St Ives. The highest count was of 200+, around two fishing vessels off Vigo, 3 Nov 2000.

Herring Gull *(Larus argentatus)*, Aberdeen Harbour, UK, March 2002.
Photo: Sam Alexander.

Lesser Black-backed Gull ***Larus fuscus***. Seen in May and Jun 1991 and Feb 1992, southernmost (juveniles) at 14.4N, 26 nm SW of Dakar (28 May, 0745 hrs), and 39.5N, 100 nm west of Ilha Berlenga (Cabo Carvoeiro), Portugal, 16 Feb (0800 hrs). The southernmost adults were seen in the Bay of Biscay at 46.2N, 4 Jun (0754 hrs), and 46.9N, 17 Feb (1724 hrs). Highest counts were of two birds.

Great Black-backed Gull ***Larus marinus***. Seen in Jun 1991 (one adult only) and Nov 2000, southernmost at 48.1N (4 Jun, 1603 hrs) and 50.4N (four adults, two juveniles, 5 Nov, noon, highest count). On 5 Nov off England birds were seen only west of Land's End and in the Bristol Channel.

Black-headed Gull ***Larus ridibundus***. There were only two sightings, one and two birds, adults, winter plumage, Bay of Biscay, 4 Nov 2000 (1228 and 1259 hrs), southernmost at 46.8N 7.4W.

Kittiwake ***Rissa tridactyla***. Seen only north of Tenerife, Feb 1992 (adults only) and Nov 2000, southernmost at 45.7N (17 Feb, 1211 hrs) and 36.2N (juvenile or 'tarrock', 1 Nov, 0745 hrs). The first adult in 2000 was seen at 46.6N, 4 Nov (1155 hrs). The highest count was of six birds, 5 Nov 2000.

Tern Sp. ***Sterna* Sp.** Seen at 44.9N 10.3W on 17 Feb 1992 (0815 hrs), at 11.5N 17.4W on 27 Oct 2000 (1749 hrs) and at 38.2N 11.1W on 1 Nov 2000 (1618 hrs), highest count 3 birds, 27 Oct 2000.

'Commic' Tern ***Sterna hirundo/paradisaea***. One, in winter plumage, was seen at 15.3N 17.6W, 28 Oct 2000 (0811 hrs).

Sooty Tern ***Sterna fuscata***. There were sightings of one and two birds, adults, at 1N 14W (1246 hrs), 9 Feb 1992, flying north.

Black Noddy ***Anous minutus***. Singles were seen at 3.2S 11.7W, 8 Feb 1992 (1714 hrs), and 7.5S 14.5W, 24 Oct 2000 (1703 hrs), the latter 31 nm NW of Ascension.

Black Noddies *(Anous minutus)*, Egg Island, St Helena, December 2001.
Photo: BW Rowlands.

Common Noddy ***Anous stolidus***. One was seen at 1N 14W, 9 Feb 1992 (1233 hrs).

Guillemot ***Uria aalge***. Sightings only off England, in Bristol Channel (50.1N), 18 Feb 1992 (three birds, 0827 hrs, in N'ly gale, Force 8-9), and one between Falmouth and the Lizard (50.1N), 5 Nov 2000, 0807 hrs (S'ly winds, Force 5-6).

Guillemot *(Uria aalge).* Fowlsheugh, Stonehaven, UK, July 2001.
Photo: Sam Alexander.

Discussion

Of the 25 identified species, only five were recorded on all three voyages, these being Cory's Shearwater, Madeiran Storm-petrel, Northern Gannet, Arctic Skua and Pomarine Skua. On the May-June voyage the number of species identified was 13, in February 18, and in October-November it was 19. Eight species were recorded on just one voyage, 12 on two voyages. On no voyage between Ascension and Cardiff was there a day without sightings. This is probably due to the presence of transequatorial migrants (see above), and the close proximity of the voyage track to continental land north of the Equator.

Flying-fish, being a principal prey of boobies and other seabirds, were recorded on all three voyages, northward every day from Ascension waters. Varying in size, they occurred in singles to large schools. On the first voyage this was as far as 28.5N 16.1W, seven nm NE of Santa Cruz de Tenerife, 31 May 1991 (1640 hrs, sea 20.3C). Next day (0700 hrs) the sea was 18.9C. In 1992 the northernmost sighting (11 Feb, 1253 hrs) was at 12.9N 18W (sea 21.3C, next day 0800 hrs 20.8C), and in 2000 (28 Oct, 1748 hrs) it was at 17.8N 17.6W (sea 27.6C, next day 0800 hrs 19.9C).

It is well established that Great Shearwaters *Puffinus gravis* depart their South Atlantic breeding grounds (Tristan-Gough, Falklands) in April and winter off eastern USA and Canada as far north as 66N, in July-August, travelling via the western Atlantic Ocean, i.e. the eastern littoral of South America (Voous and Wattel 1963, Bourne 1995).

Records of northbound Great Shearwaters between Ascension Island and the bulge of West Africa in May and southbound birds off Vigo and in the Bay of Biscay in November (this paper), and others (below) would suggest that the eastern Atlantic Ocean is an alternative annual migration route.

Birds have also been seen off Dakar, Senegal, in October and November, and are known to return south off the West African littoral in December, while more than 300 were seen in gathering flocks off the Isles of Scilly, SW England, in October 2002 (Bourne 1995, Marr, Newell and Porter 1998, Woolley 2003). This would agree with the presence of southbound birds in early November off Vigo, as the latter is on the direct route south from the UK. The flocks seen on arrival at Vigo on 2 November may well have been the last in the season, as suggested by only singles being seen on my departure from Vigo, 3 November, and in the Bay of Biscay the following day.

Acknowledgements

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SCOTTISH SEABIRD CENTRE

The Scottish Seabird Centre is an award-winning Centre overlooking the sea, only 30 minutes from Edinburgh by car, bus or special ScotRail train deal. It has just been awarded a hat-trick - Visit Scotland Five Stars, Thistle Award 2002 Tourism and the Environment and the Gold Level Green Tourism Business Award.

The Centre has panoramic views of the islands of the Forth, with Discovery Centre, shop, licensed café/bistro and open decking. Using live 'Big Brother' cameras, visitors are enjoying the most amazing spectacles of spring and summer - gannets and guillemots with eggs (with eyes peeled for the first chicks) and puffins spring-cleaning their burrows. There have also been several porpoise sightings in the last few months.

The Centre is open all year except Christmas Day - Summer 10.00 -18.00, Winter 10.00-16.00 weekdays/10.00-17.30 weekends. Summer Evening Licensed Café open Friday and Saturday from 13 June 2003.

There is a full programme of events throughout the year including the popular Open Air Film and Harbour Festival and a weekend cinema club, with tickets available to the public on the day.

If you would like to be kept informed by email of latest developments and events or the wildlife, etc, please email the Centre at membership.ssc@freeuk.com

Corrigendum for *Sea Swallow 51* pp30-32

Stan Howe has forwarded the following comments on Capt Barritt's article on a transit of the Suez Canal in 2002.

'I read Capt Barritt's passage through the Suez Canal with some nostalgia. The confusing corvids rooked him through. The species pushing the resident Hoodies is the Indian House Crow *(Corvus splendens)*. It came in Port Tawfiq presumably ship-assisted, and had already spread up the canal to Ismailia by 1967. The population when I was in Egypt was estimated at approaching 1000. As I understand it it is continuing to expand. NO Carrion Crows have ever been admitted to the Egyptian list.

As to Bee-Eaters, the most likely other species to be considered is the Blue-cheeked *(ssp persicus)* which migrates up the canal in numbers during March/April. The Little Green *(ssp cleopatra)* is resident in the Nile Delta/ Valley with the odd one being seen as far east as the canal.'

Sea Swallow 52 (2003)

SIXTY DEGREES NORTH LATITUDE
A BALTIC ODYSSEY

by Stan Howe

In June 2003 I took a trip by ship (and train) from Stockholm 59:20N+18:03E to St Petersburg 59:57N+30:00E via Mariehamn 60:06N+19:56E, Turku 60:27N+22:17E and Helsinki 60:10N+24:57E, before returning home to Scotland via Tallinn (Estonia) 59:26N+24:48E.

It was never likely to be the most exciting birding because of being outside the migration season, but the weather was benign throughout with the sea flat calm to glassy so hours spent on deck with a pair of binoculars was no great ordeal either.

The 10 June was passed in exploring the inner reaches of the harbour and the canals. The gull community comprised Lesser Black-backed *Gull (Larus fuscus)*, Herring Gull *(Larus argentatus)*, *Common Gull (Larus canus)* and Common Black-headed Gull *(Larus ridibundus)*. An aggregation of these species went bananas as a Northern Goshawk *(Accipiter gentilis)* appeared over the water by the Esplanade in the evening. On the sea were Mute Swan *(Cygnus olor)* - over 50 seen, Tufted Duck *(Aythia fuligula)*, and a lone Canada Goose *(Branta canadensis)*. The niche lately occupied in Britain by the latter species seemed to have been reserved here for the Barnacle Goose *(Branta leucopsis)*. Once a denizen of the far north it has been breeding freely in the mid-Baltic since the 1970s I was told. The first group I noticed were on Djursgarden Island, on the lawns outside the Vasa Museum, competing with the museum's external exhibits (Finngrundet Lightship and the old steam icebreaker Sankt Erik) for my attention. On other islands the usual urban birds were noted - Great Tit *(Parus major)*, Blue Tit *(Parus caeruleus)*, Eurasian Blackbird *(Turdus merula)*, House Sparrow *(Passer domesticus)*, Common *Swift (Apus apus)*, Black-billed Magpie *(Pica pica)*, Hooded Crow *(Corvus corone)*, White Wagtail *(Motacilla alba)* and Feral Pigeon *(Columba livia)*. The presence of Fieldfare (Turdus *pilaris)* however, sitting prominently on lamp-posts and aggressively squawking was not what one normally encounters in Britain. A lone wader in a reed bed looking suspiciously like a Ruff *(Philomachus pugnax)* remains only a possible sighting.

Embarked on the *ms Viking Gabriella* on June 11th, a tortuous path was followed east and north through the Stockholm archipelago which is said to contain over 24,000 isles. The gull fraternity of the previous day were present, sometimes following in our wake, or being fickle and transferring their attentions to other passing vessels. Past the fortress of Vaxholm with another bevy of Mute Swan offshore, our path became a steadier northerly one, or at least as steady as the myriad of islets would allow. The inner passage became quite narrow in places like Furusund; frighteningly narrow at times for a landlubber on a 35,000GT ferry. By this stage rafts of Eider duck *(Somateria mollissima)* with créches of young were the norm, when suddenly large flights of Great Cormorant *(Phalacrocorax carbo)* were seen, Arctic Terns *(Sterna paradisaea)* appeared amongst the gulls, and a lone sawbill, probably Red-breasted Merganser *(Merganser serrator)*. Since returning home I find this assemblage was in the vicinity of a Swedish nature reserve where all these species breed. In the case of the Great Cormorant some were sitting on nests in fir trees on small islands, so close to the ferry one felt able to stretch out and touch them.

This nesting habitat is apparently the usual (albeit unusual) one for Baltic cormorants, which are attributable to the Eastern race spp.*sinensis*. Hoodies were hanging around, no doubt for nefarious purpose.

By the time the ferry passed Soderam Lighthouse and broke out into the Aland Sea, the birdlife was mainly restricted to rafts of Eider and a few Mallard *(Anas platyrhynchos)*. The first Eider drakes however were spotted here, a group of 8 flying in from the open sea.

For the short time it took to cross the shipping channel that leads north into the Gulf of Bothnia even gulls were at a premium, but soon we were approaching Kobbaklinter and entering another archipelago, the Aland Islands. Once more family parties of Common Eider appeared, followed by sea-borne Mute Swans as the capital Mariehamn became visible. My plan was to disembark here for 24hrs to visit the 4-masted steel barque *Pommern*. This vessel was built on the Clyde exactly 100-yrs ago, and is featured on postage stamps that the Aland Islands still have a right to issue even though they have been an integral Swedish-speaking part of Finland since 1923. On *Pommern*, retired as recently as 1937 from tile Australian grain trade, various memorabilia from her days crossing the Southern Oceans are displayed. Of particular interest to the ornithologist were photographs of birds on her deck (maybe in the Great Australian Bight), viz. Wandering Albatross *(Diomedea exulans)* and Little Penguin *(Eudyptula minor)* . Mariehamn otherwise held the usual gulls with Scandinavian Jackdaw *(Corvus monedula)* and Yellowhammer *(Emberiza citronella)* to add to the swift, wagtail, sparrow and fieldfare already tagged in Stockholm. Eurasian Oystercatchers *(Haematopus ostralegus)* were calling overhead during the night.

Departure from Aland on June 12th, once more on ms Viking Gabriella, saw us again accompanied by Lesser Black-backed, Herring & Common Gulls; only once again to be abandoned by most of these birds as we encountered the incoming Viking ferry. Our routing now was to take us through the Ledskar Narrows before running north around Foglo I, then east towards the next archipelago (that shielding Turku). Eiders and Common/Arctic Terns were noted along this stretch, until just off Overo (Foglo) when the long expected but elusive White- bellied Sea-Eagle *(Haliaeetus leucogaster)* appeared; a pair flying to land on the exposed rock of a small tree island. These and another (single) Great Cormorant were the highlights of this passage.

The light was getting gloomy as we transited the approaches to Turku. Mute Swans, Eiders, Tufted Duck and the now familiar gulls were seen. Common Swifts were still airborne and screaming as we docked at the mouth of the Aurajoki River close to Turku's mediaeval castle. On June 13th here there were nothing more exciting than Black-headed Gulls, Scandinavian Jackdaws, White Wagtails and House Sparrows. However the next day during the two hour train journey to Helsinki I did spot a Common Crane *(Grus grus)* in an arable field close to Pohja.

During a brief sojourn in Helsinki I found plenty of opportunity to get back on the water to visit a few of the attractions on the harbour's islands including the fortress complex of Suomenlinna-Sveaborg, and the zoo on Korkeasaari. The majority birds were again Black-headed Gull, Common Gull, Herring Gull and Lesser Black-backed Gull with Arctic Tern also

present. Mute Swan, Eider, and Mallard were on the sea. Oystercatcher, Hooded Crow, Black-billed Magpie, White Wagtail, Fieldfare, Great Tit and House Sparrow were around the docksides. Spotted for the first time on the trip were Wigeon *(Anas Penelope)*, Common Sandpiper *(Tringa hypoleucos)* and Chaffinch *(Fringilla coelebs)*. On Suomenlinna Common Gull and Barnacle Geese were shepherding their young about, inside the curtain walls. On Korkeasaari were a pair of Northern Wheatear *(Oenanthe oenanthe)*. On the zoo's lawns an exotic Common Peafowl *(Pavo cristatus)* stalked free; whilst captive in the aviaries were local species like Northern Hawk Owl *(Surnia ulula)* and Boreal Waxwing *(Bombycilla garrulus)*!

On June 16th boarding the cruise ship *ms Kristina Regina* (registered out of Kotka, at 5000GT it seemed a toy-town boat after the huge Viking Line ferries) for a round trip to St Petersburgh, finding only 200 rather than 2000 passengers was a relief. Swifts were heard over the Helsinki terminal as we sailed, followed by the inevitable gulls and the odd tern. These were intermittent after we swung east along the 60'N line towards Russia. Bedtime came with Gogland just to the north, yet with plenty of detail in its rugged profile to be seen on a 'white night' typical of this latitude in mid-summer. This to be replaced at sun-up by even closer views of Kotlin Island with its Kronstadt fortress and cathedral cupola offering a backdrop to the 'home fleet' port, which to the un-tutored eye looked rather overstocked with rusting hulks. The harbour wall at that early hour was packed with roosting seabirds of the ilk already frequently mentioned, and those same species continued to abound as we proceeded along the sea-canal through the eastern limits of the Gulf of Finland towards the River Neva estuary. Only a Great Crested Grebe *(Podiceps cristatus)*, a Tufted Duck and a putative Wood Pigeon *(Columba livia)* - alliteratively perched on a post with a pouted pink breast - suggested variety.

St Petersburgh is a Grand place *sensu stricto*. But it has suffered and is unashamedly a trifle run down. As if to emphasise this contrast, parts of the city had been elaborately restored - especially those bits visited by Blair and Bush in May 2003 for a summit coinciding with the tercentenary of its foundation by Tsar Peter the Great. HRH Prince Charles it was later revealed was set to visit the graves of his relatives the Romanovs in another spruced up edifice, the mausoleum inside Peter and Paul Fortress, in July. Other historic relics however seemed to have avoided the tarting-up process, to whit the celebrated ice-breaker *Krasin* (built on the Tyne in 1916) moored just down the Lt Smidt Embankment from the Kristina Regina's berth, and the battle-cruiser Aurora that fired the first shot to launch the October Revolution in 1917. Her anchor chains and mooring buoy provided a convenient perch for a dozen Arctic Tern, her rigging doing the same for a similar number of Common Black-headed Gulls. Around our berth the most obvious birds were Swifts overhead, Common Starling *(Sturnus vulgaris)* with House Sparrow on the embankment, and a few Mallard on the river.

A quick sally out of town on June 18th to the Summer Palace at Peterhof on the southern shore of the Gulf led to House Martins *(Delichon urbica)* and Swifts being observed nesting in the palace facade. The entrance hall behind the facade quickly challenged my grasp of naval history, being given over to a reply of the Battle of Tcheshme Bay (1778) where I now know British commanders led the Russian fleet to a famous victory over the Turks. To transliterate that bay into local spelling requires certain diacritics not available to me, so let it suffice to be told it lies between Chios and the Asia Minor mainland.

The return passage to Helsinki on 18/19th June was a virtual replay of the inbound run except for a skein of geese (12 and most likely Barnacles) seen to starboard flying northwest towards inshore islands near 60N+25E a short time before the vessel turned north into harbour.

On the afternoon of 19 June the 15 knot Kristina Regina was exchanged for a 36 knot catamaran to make the 90-minute dash across to Tallinn. The Nordic Jet was all about hermetically sealed, the sole outside deck space being a couple of square metres at the stern for disciplines of Sir Walter Raleigh. All told it was remarkable therefore that I even managed to log a single bird, but an all black seaduck which I am near certain was a Common Scoter *(Melanitta nigra)* stood out on a sunlit glassy sea in the very centre of the Gulf of Finland where Finnish waters meet Estonia. As we reduced speed off Naissaar Island and entered the approaches to Tallinn, old friends began to reappear. Herring Gulls and Arctic Terns first, then inside the harbour, as we did a tight 3-point turn to dock among disdainful Mute Swans, came scuds of Common and Black-headed Gulls. Up on the adjacent hill where the old Hanseatic League town stands, these gulls with Common Swift, White Wagtail and House Sparrow continued to be the most obtrusive birds. At the foot of the hill however, from the broken windows of a deserted warehouse, Young Barn Swallows *(Hirundo rustica)* were taking their first flights. Only then did I realise they were a first for the whole trip; not an earth shattering record - but as the most often reported landbird in the pages of *Sea Swallow* perhaps not the least appropriate end-point for my journey.

Stan Howe
Torphins
15 July 2003

Sea Swallow 52 (2003)

ANTARCTIC BIRDS FROM AMUNDSEN, BELLINGSHAUSEN & ROSS SEAS - ADDITIONS TO RNBWS DATABASE

by Stan Howe

Attention has previously been drawn to the paucity of records in the RNBWS database from the southwest sector of the Pacific Coast, and specifically the near Antarctic seas stretching from Anvers Island (65W) to the Ross Ice Shelf (180W). It might therefore now be excusable to make retrospective reference to a voyage my neighbours, Sarah Wanless and Mike Harris from the Hill of Brathens Research Centre, made through those waters on *ms World Discoverer* in Jan/Feb 1987, and to summerise for the membership the birds they recorded. The full account was published in Br. Antarct. Surv. Bull. No 81, 1988, pp87-92. My thanks to both of them for providing the copy from which this digest was provided.

1. Adelie Penguin *(Pygoscelis adeliae):*
71 @ 71:07S+172:33W on 5 Feb.

2. Black-browed Albatross *(Diomedea melanophris):*
1 @ 68:18S+094:22W on 30 Jan.

3. Light-mantled Albatross *(Phoebetria palpebrata):*
2 @ 68:18S+094:22W on 30 Jan; 1 @ 67:34S+161:52W on 4 Feb.

4. Antarctic Giant Petrel *(Macronectes giganteus):*
2 @ 65:48S+072:49W on 28 Jan; 2 @ 69:38S+084:51W on 29 Jan;
11 @ 68: 18S+094 :22W on 30 Jan; 2 @ 67:15S+136:32W on 2 Feb;
1 @ 66:53S+149:OOW on 3 Feb; 8 @ 67:34S+161:52W on 4 Feb;
1 @ 71:07S+172:33W on 5 Feb.

5. Southern Fulmar *(Fulmarus glacialoides):*
14 @ 65:48S+072:49W on 28 Jan; 445 @ 69:38S+084:51W on 29 Jan;
33 @ 68:18S+094:22W on 30 Jan; 8 @ 67:55S+108:51W on 31 Jan;
3 @ 67:15S+136:32W on 2 Feb; 46 @ 66:53S+149:OOW on 3 Feb;
1 @ 67:34S+161:52W on 4 Feb; 1 @ 71:07S+172:33W on 5 Feb.

6. Antarctic Petrel *(Thalassoica antarctica):*
31 @ 65:48S+072:49W on 28 Jan; 16 @ 69:38S+084:51W on 29 Jan;
12 @ 67:55S+108:51W on 31 Jan; 2250 @ 67:34S+161:52W on 4 Feb;
80 @ 71:07S+172:33W on 5 Feb.

7. Cape Petrel *(Daption capense):*
41 @ 65:48S+072:49W on 28 Jan; 61 @ 69:38S+084:51W on 29 Jan;
300 @ 68:18S+094:11W on 30 Jan; 144 @ 67:55S+108:51W on 31 Jan;
28 @ 67:38S+122:32W on 1 Feb; 5 @ 67:15S+136:32W on 2 Feb;
2 @ 67:34S+161:52W on 4 Feb; 1 @ 71:07S+172:33W on 5 Feb.

8.Snow Petrel *(Pagodroma nivea):*
3 @ 66:53S+149W on 3 Feb; 3 @ 67:34S+161:52W on 4 Feb;
8 @ 71:07S+172:33W on 5 Feb.

9. Kerguelen Petrel *(Pterodroma brevirostris):*
1 @ 67:15S+136:32W on 2 Feb; 3 @ 67:34S+161: 52W on 4 Feb.

10. Mottled Petrel *(Pterodroma inexpectata):*
9 @ 67:34S+161:52W on 4 Feb; 10 @ 71:07S+172:33W

11. Blue Petrel *(Halobaena caerulea):*
1 @ on 28 Jan; 4 @ on 29 Jan;
5 @ on 30 Jan; 11 @ on 1 Feb;
53 @ on 2 Feb; 11 @ on 3 Feb;
2320 @ on 4 Feb.

12. Wilson's Storm-petrel *(Oceanites oceanicus):*
19 @ on 28 Jan; 8 @ on 29 Jan;
14 @ on 30 Jan; 1 @ on 31 Jan;
2 @ on 4 Feb; 5 @ on 5 Feb.

13. Black-bellied Storm-petrel *(Fregetta tropica):*
1 @ on 29 Jan.

14. South Polar Skua *(Catharacta maccormicki):*
1 @ on 2 9 Jan.

15. Arctic Tern *(Sterna paradisaea):*
5 @ on 5 Feb.

In addition many whale sightings were reported with Minke Whale *(Balaenoptera acutorostrata)* present on most days. Other species less frequently observed included Pilot Whale *(Globicephala melaena)*, Killer Whale *(Orcinus orca)*, Humpback Whale *(Megoptera noveangliae)* and Fin Whale *(Balaenoptera physalus)*.

Stan Howe,
Torphins, 15 July 2003.

NOTES ON BIRDS OF THE SOUTHERN OCEAN

[Captain C.C. Dixon published an important pioneer paper 'Some observations on the albatrosses and other birds of the southern oceans' in the *Transactions of the Royal Canadian* Institute 19: 117-130 in 1933 plotting, apparently for the first time, changes in the numbers and distribution of birds at sea during the year. In it he says details are deposited in the Royal Ontario Museum, so while preparing his book *Albatrosses*, Lance Tickell enquired about them. They include Dixon's calculations instead of his log-books, which would now be of much more interest, but with them was what appears to be a transcript of a talk to the museum about his observations which still seems of interest, so we are publishing it here.

Certain points are of interest. Most of Dixon's observations must have been made before publication of the first seabird guide, W.B. Alexander's *Birds of the Ocean, in* 1928, and he was apparently still unable to separate the great albatrosses, putting all the whiter ones down as 'regia', Royal *Diomedea epomophora*, some with red on the head, when Lance Tickell says he thinks this only occurs in Wanderers *D. exulans*. He also only recognises two mollymawks, the Black-browed *Thalassarche melanophris*, including the only recently described North Pacific Laysan Albatross *Phoebastria immutabilis*, and the Yellow-nosed *T. chlororhynchos*, and one Sooty Albatrosses *Phoebetria* and Giant Petrel *Macronectes;* this does not greatly affect the value of his observations of changing distribution at sea. He also made meticulous records of 16 measurements of 89 birds which came on board (can they have been eating them? Great Albatrosses are said to taste good...). Most agree well with museum specimens; those not obtainable from them are given in Table 1.

WRP Bourne

Further Notes on Birds of The Southern Ocean

From the title of this paper you may infer that some observations on the subject have been published. If I may, I wish here to explain the circumstances under which the published observations and the few additional ones which follow were made. The speaker was on sailing vessels for a total of 34 years and 4 months during which time he sailed some million and twenty-seven thousand miles. A considerable portion of this distance was covered as a juvenile but from the time I chose the sea as a profession and signed on with the official rating of Deck Boy until I left sail some 26 years later, 823,000 miles were traversed.

From the first day of my profession service, a diary of some kind was kept, at intervals at first and later regularly. From the time I took command of a ship until I left sail, a period of over 15 years, a log was kept for every day at sea. Being primarily interested in meteorology, I undertook the keeping of the 4-hourly meteorological log for the British Meterological office. As the original books remained my property, I included in this book observations on other subjects. Of the 823,000 miles covered since notes were kept, about a quarter of a million miles lay within the zone bounded by the 30th and 60th parallels of south latitude. Approximately 2,000 days were spent at sea in this region.

It might be well to give some idea of the area of this region. It embraces about 27,250,000 square miles. There are some 2½ million square miles of land and equal number of square miles of ice, leaving some 22 million square miles of open ocean, which is, roughly, four times the combined area of the United States of Canada. It may be readily appreciated then that my observations over so large an area are scant enough, but they appear to be more numerous and

concern a wider area than those from any other single source. They therefore contribute something toward an understanding of the range and distribution and possibly the migration of many sea birds.

In the published paper, a chart has been reproduced showing routes and certain observations, but it contains only the number of observations per unit square and an artificial figure which represented the number of birds per 1,000 square miles. This was calculated from the number of observations and the actual number of birds seen. While often based on very scant information, it serves to make comparison between regions.

There is a great deal of additional information on the original charts. These may be seen in the library of this museum by anyone interested. An interesting feature brought out by the prepared charts and perhaps worthy of comment concerns the sporadic distribution of birds of the South Seas. Apparently certain sections of the sea may be avoided by a species although it frequents surrounding sections. The presence or absence of land has nothing to do with the occurrence or absence in these cases. Sometimes occurrence of a species in a certain area appears to be seasonal.

I wish here to submit a few notes which have not been published. The first of these pertain to the northern limits of the various species observed. When sailing south into the Albatross region, or north out of it; the wandering Albatross was the first southern bird seen of the last to leave 30 times out of 45 recordings. The farthest north I have seen a wandering Albatross was the 24th parallel, in November in the Atlantic, and the 28th parallel in march in the pacific. Of the other 15 recordings, four were of the smaller Albatrosses, twice the Yellow-nosed and twice the black Browed. The farthest north for the former was Lat 25 degrees South in the Atlantic and Lat 33 1/2 degrees South in the Pacific. Both of these observations were made in the winter. The farthest north for the latter was Lat 36 degrees South in the Atlantic in summer and Lat 29 1/2 degrees South in the Pacific in winter. Twice the great grey Shearwater was first to be seen. Both of these records were made in winter at Lat 27 degrees South in the Atlantic and Lat 35 degrees South in the Pacific.

Twice the Cape Pigeon or Pintado Petrel was the first to be seen, both times in winter, once in the Pacific in Lat 29 1/2 degrees South and once in the Atlantic in Lat 30 degrees South .

The remaining seven records of first and last birds concern the White Chinned Petrel. All these records were made in the Atlantic, and all but one were made in winter. The latitudes where these observations were made varied from Lat 31 1/2 to 26 1/2 degrees South.

Alexander records seeing the Pintado Petrel on Tropic Isles, in the Marquesas in Lat 8 degrees South, and in Mexico, and the Black Browed Albatross in the north Pacific. While accepting these records, as I myself have seen the Black Browed Albatross in numbers in the north Pacific, it seems strange indeed to me that in all my seagoing experience, I never saw any of them within 1,500 miles of the Equator. Assuredly I would have set it down if such an observation had been made.

An instance from my records will serve to illustrate the possible influence of wind direction on bird movement. The record is as follows: 38 1/2 degrees SL in the Atlantic, bound, north, wind north-west, the only birds seen were four petrels. The next day, some 180 miles farther north after the wind had shifted to south-west, large numbers of petrels were observed and many other species of southern ocean birds were noted. Wind direction has, I think a notable bearing on the fact that Albatross frequently follow a ship for many days. I have quite often identified an individual with a broken feather in the wing or tail, or cut webs, and seen it on successive days after the ship had sailed from 200 to 260 nautical miles in 24 hours. As mentioned in published notes, by no chance could it rise to a height to see the ship after resting

over night. I have never seen it higher than 200 feet and very seldom 150, and it would have to rise to 10,000 or more to see the vessel after even eight hours of darkness. I think the explanation in such cases is in the wind direction and velocity. Often for many days on end the wind is from the west and of a velocity of 40 to 50 mph.

If the bird should rest overnight and at dawn start its zigzag flight, say even two or three miles each way across the wind and going to leeward some 40 mph, in a few hours it would overtake the ship going before the wind some 10 or 12 knots.

One note which i wish to make concerns the Wandering Albatross or the Regia. Its fully adult plumage is white except for the wing tips. I have frequently noted a pink or rose-coloured band about the neck, some six or seven inches broad. This colour appeared to be deeper in a shade on the sides of the neck than either the back or the front. The colour was not a surface wash, as determined from freshly killed specimens, but extended deep into the feather mass.

On such skins as I preserved, this colour vanished within a very short time. I understand that similar pigmentation occurs in gulls, etc, but it appears not to be generally known to occur on Albatrosses.

One other record from my note concerns an observation I shall never forget since the sight impressed itself so vividly on my memory. I saw at sea a large flock of small shore birds which I believe not to have been Phalaropes. This flock of thousands filled one quarter of the horizon. There was a heavily overcast sky and grey leaden sea. When these birds wheeled in unison their white under-surfaces flashed like giant snowflakes but as they turned again in unison and presented their upper surfaces they vanished from my sight, so completely did their colour coincide with the background of the sky and sea.

Some Biometrics of Southern Seabirds

	No	Wingspan (mm)	Length (mm)	Weight (gm)
Great Albatross	42	3099	1143	7827
Diomedea sp.		(2921-3454)	(1067-1257)	(5897-10433)
Yellow-nosed A.	13	2159	838	3515
Thalassarch sp.		(2045-2299)	(800-869)	(3289-4082)
Black-browed a	10	2210	864	3515
Thalassarch sp.		(2134-2286)	(800-902)	(3175-3856)
Sooty Albatross	5	2121	864	2945
Phoebetria sp		(2032-2184)	(800-914)	(2155-3175)
Giant Petrel	6	2032	864	2948
Macronectes sp		(1803-2133)	(762-914)	(2495-4990)
Southern Fulmar	2	1156	489	907
Fulmarus glacialoides				
Cape Petrel	1	914	406	-
Daption capense				
White-headed Petrel	1	1041	470	907
Pterodroma lessonii				
Prion	1	559	254	-
Pachyptila sp.				
Grey Petrel	6	1219	495	907
Procellaria cinera				
Spectacled Petrel	1	1321	533	680
Procellaria conspicillate				
Skua	1(f)	1422	810	1360
Catharacta sp				

Measurements converted from inches to mm. and weight in pounds to grams. The old name Great Grey Shearwater used for the Grey Petrel, unexpected on board.

THE MIGRATION ATLAS
THE MOVEMENTS OF THE BIRDS OF BRITAIN AND IRELAND

T&AD Poyser 2002
ISBN 0713665149

Not so long ago we thought that Swallows *(Hirundo rustica)* spent the winter at the bottom of ponds and lakes, and Barnacle Geese *(Branta leucopsis)* really did come from Barnacles. Ideas such as these helped to explain the unexplainable. Where did these familiar birds go? The answer of course as we all know is that birds migrate. But where to, why and how? Ringing studies and observations over the last century have helped to shed light on the subject and the results have been collated by the BTO and published in this remarkable book.

The first thing to strike you about this book is its sheer size and weight! It makes heavy bedtime reading in the literal sense of the word.

The early chapters deal with the methodology and interpretation of ringing data, and a history of ringing in Britain and Ireland. There is also a fascinating short account of how and why birds migrate, including the impact of weather on bird movements which should be required reading for anyone who has ever been fascinated by the spectacle of migration.

The main section of the book deals with the species accounts, and this follows closely the pattern of both the breeding and wintering atlas in devoting two or three pages to each of the major species and a half page for the minor species. For the major species, tables and charts show ringing locations, recovery data, and finding circumstances. Perhaps the most interesting illustrated data are the maps indicating where birds have been ringed and later recovered - red lines in the case of British ringed birds, and blue lines for foreign ringed birds recovered in Britain. A general introduction is given for each species and in many cases this relies on information from BWP and the *Breeding Atlas*. As the data from the Atlas is now at least 12 years old I fear some of the comments may be out of date. The statement that the Hobby *(Falco subbuteo)* breeds south of a line between the Humber and Mersey with isolated records to the North and West has surely altered over the past decade with regular breeding now in the North of England. Perhaps I am being a bit pernickety when the book is filled with masses of interesting facts and data that one can come across at will. Did you know for instance that not all adult Sandwich Terns *(Sterna sandvicensis)* migrate from their winter quarters or that the Turtle Dove *(Streptopefla turtur)* is the only trans-Saharan migrant to remain graniverous all year round?

Amazingly in a book of this size it is remarkably easy to find ones way around all the information. The contents page is clearly laid out, and the index is brief, restricting itself to the species accounts. Beware however that the new BOU names have been adopted so there are many species with added epithets such as 'Eurasian' or 'Common'. 60 pages of references give an indication as to the amount of work, which has gone into the production of this book.

This is a major work, and many congratulations must go to everyone who has had a hand in its production, from the editors and species account writers to the illustrators and statisticians, this is a book to savour again and again. The real heroes of course are the army of ringers and birdwatchers who catch and recover these birds. Those rainy mornings checking nets with frozen fingers have not been in vain.

D Clegg

BIRDS AND LIGHT
THE ART OF LARS JONSSON

Christopher Helm 2002
ISBN 0713664053

Over the past 200 years the world of ornithology has been lucky to have a number of great artists working at the very forefront of the science. From Bewick and Audubon, through to Peterson and Scott birds and art have gone hand in hand. One of the today's leading bird artists is undoubtedly Lars Jonsson, and the publication of this book will hopefully bring his work to a wider, more general audience.

Most birders approaching this book will be familiar with Jonssons work, primarily through the old 5 volume Pan guides, which were later collated and expanded into the wonderful *Birds of Europe* in 1992. This book is a complete overview of his life and work, from his earliest childhood drawings to the very latest paintings. The plates are stunning, no other word will suffice. If you are a fan of his work you should buy this book immediately, sit down, and lose yourself amongst the oils, watercolours and pencil sketches. Some selfportraits, landscapes and still life works are included, but it is the bird paintings that really show Jonsson at his best. Who cannot be impressed by the Garden Warbler on p.91, a simple pencil and watercolour sketch that portrays the very essence of this charming Sylvia warbler. As expected in a book of this kind the production values are high. Helm has pulled out all the stops, and the result is a book that exudes quality. From the heavyweight paper to the feel of the dust jacket this is a book to savour.

The book is let down somewhat by the text, though perhaps this is a result of its translation from the original Swedish. The style is a little stilted and formal, even pretentious *'Even the House Sparrow could not be conclusively and ultimately defined in a picture. Having seen many of Lars Jonsson's bird portraits. we ought perhaps to treat his statement on the impossibility of the task with a degree of wonder, as a manifestation of extreme humility'* - quite! The layout is also a little odd, being a mixture of essays, interviews and biography. The biography however is at the back of the book, so we find out all about his work and inspiration before we learn something about his life. It is as though someone has collated a series of articles and pasted them in book form.

Jonssons talent ultimately wins through in the end. You won't learn anything about identification or bird movements through this book, but you will learn to appreciate birds for what they are - works of art, and as such it is to be heartily recommended.

D Clegg

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INSTRUCTIONS TO AUTHORS

Interested persons are invited to submit contributions for *Sea Swallow*. Authors do not need to be RNBWS members. Material may take the form of papers, notes, progress reports, letters or reviews.
The style used in *Sea Swallow*, should be followed, with the standard abbreviations, nomenclature and use of references.
Manuscripts should ideally be typed in double spacing, together with figures and diagrams. Accompanying photographs are preferred as prints rather than slides. Those with facilities to do so are encouraged to send on IBM PC compatible 3.5" disc (specifying the word processing software used) or CD Rom, together with a hard copy print.
Contributions are welcome at any time, but if for inclusion in the next edition, must reach the Editor by 31 May.